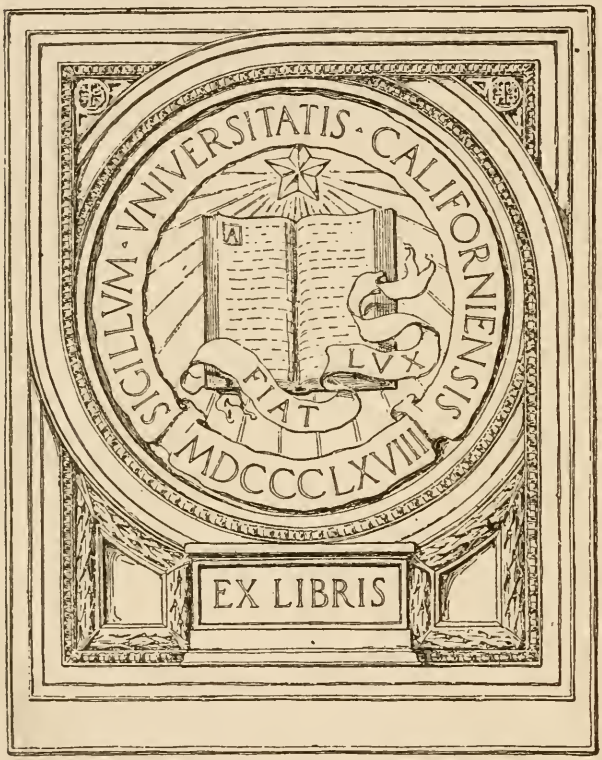
BY VELDT AND KOPJE

BY W. C. SCULLY

ALVMNVS BOOK FVND



155
S231
6

a

BY VELDT AND KOPJE

NEW SIX-SHILLING NOVELS

Crown 8vo, Cloth

THE CRIMSON AZALEAS. By H. de Vere Stacpoole.

THE RED SPHINX. By Edward U. Valentine and S. Eccleston Harper.

THE FOUR PHILANTHROPISTS. By Edgar Jepson.

ME AND MYN. By S. R. Crockett.

THE QUEEN OF A DAY. By J. S. Fletcher.

THE SOUL OF A PRIEST. By the Duke Litta.

London: T. FISHER UNWIN

BY VELDT AND KOPJE

BY

WILLIAM CHARLES SCULLY

Author of

"Kaffir Stories," "Between Sun and Sand," etc.

LONDON

T. FISHER UNWIN

ADELPHI TERRACE

1907

[*All rights reserved*]

TO

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL

SIR WILLIAM FRANCIS BUTLER

THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED

(*Ecclesiastes*, vii. 5)

387193

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Voices of Africa	xi
The Lepers	1
The Writing on the Rock	27
Tommy's Evil Genius	39
The Wisdom of the Serpent	51
Rainmaking	67
The Gratitude of a Savage	79
Mr Bloxam's Choice	93
A Case for Psychical Research	145
Chicken Wings	167
Afar in the Desert	193
By the Waters of Marah	217
The Hunter of the Didima	253
A Forgotten Expedition	269
Kaffir Music	285

VOICES OF AFRICA

Africa

Sphinx among continents,—the Nations strive
To guess my ancient riddle; Greece essayed—
She drooped to death; upon me Rome set gyve—
She sank in her own bonds. The Persian laid
His life down 'mid my deserts. For a day
I smiled on each, then tore them for my play.

The Sahara

The ghosts of buried cities scale the air
When Day wakes my mirage. The lion keeps
My iron hills. The bones of men lie bare
Where my thirst-sickle its rich harvest reaps.
Time, like a little child, amid my sands
Builds and unbuilds with feeble, listless hands.

Egypt

The gods who dwell 'mid equatorial snows
Bade Nilus cleave the waste, and I awoke.
A giant, robed in mystery, I arose;
The young world listened, breathless, when I spoke.
My Sphinx Time's sister is; her brood lies hid
Where dream the dead 'neath rock and pyramid.

Carthage

Sidon sent forth her sons, her sons sent Tyre;
The Desert's daughters bore a mighty race.
The God whose brazen hands sloped to the fire
Reared o'er me the red terror of his face.
Rome, vengeful, trod me to the dust, and strowed
With salt the site where once my powers abode.

Alexandria

The godlike Alexander wav'd his sword;
Beneath its spell rose palace, mart and school,
No gold so precious as my lightest word;
My logos still the Faith of Man doth rule.
Greek, Roman and Barbarian, East and West,
Drank lore like milk from my most bounteous breast.

Mount Atlas

Time haled the great Globe from my aching back
And hung it 'mid the stars. Content I rest,
The ocean's murmured music at my feet,
The foldless flocks of cloudland round my crest.
Pan walks with Faunus through my dreaming woods,
And Dryads pace my leafy solitudes.

Ruwenzori

A diadem of changeless snow lies light
Upon my regal head ; my locks I shake,
And, straightway, living waters take their flight.
The iron bonds of Ancient Drought to break.
A virgin, new-unveiled, I stand alone ;
Æons will pass, but none unclasp my zone.

The Lakes

Hand seeking hand, a peerless sisterhood,
We watched for dawn through dark of murd'rous years
Our sky-pure fringes mired with human blood,
Our rain-sweet wavelets salt with human tears.
Our tideless glasses gleam resplendently
High o'er the rockings of the restless sea.

The Congo

Through jungles spawned from fever-drunken sod
Where, sleeplessly, the foul man-hunters hide.
The bitter lees from God's dread wine-press trod
By desperate feet, drain down my tepid tide.
Leviathan there wallows in his wrath ;
There range the hordes of mighty Behemoth.

The Zambezi

The spoils the sky had of the world-wide main
I bear, new-gathered from ten thousand rills
To where the thund'rous gates my steps enchain,
Clogged with the wastage of a million hills.
Thence, breaking forth in triumph, full and free,
I render back my booty to the sea.

Zimbabwe

I housed the brood of Carthage; they the earth
Deep rifled for its treasure. On me fell
The hand of Doom. No rumour speaks my birth,
No legend shrines my death. My citadel
Glares at the cold fane of my obscene god,
O'er which the feet of ancient ruin trod.

The Southern Deserts

The wayward Spring, in dalliance afar,
Forgets us for long seasons, till the sky
Weeps for our burning woe; then, star on star,
Rich blossoms from our glowing dunes arise.
Thirst, with his legioned agonies, still stands
Warding the barren empire of our sands.

The Black Peoples

God smote us with an itch to dip our hands
In one another's blood. Our long travail
The ages hearken to. The ocean sands
Than we are not more myriad. Men hale
Us forth in chains o'er every moaning sea
Foul with the trails of Man's iniquity.

Kimberley

I sprang from 'neath the desert sand, and cast
A double-handed shower of living gems
I' the world's astonished visage. In my vast
Black, echoing chasm, whence the bright diadems
Of half Earth's thrones are furnish'd, I can hear
The lost souls wander, wailing, far and near.

Johannesburg

A mænad seated on a golden throne;
My plaything is a nation's destiny;
My feet are clay, my bosom is a stone;
The princes of the Earth are fain of me,
But, stark, before the splendour of my gates,
The grim Boer, leaning on his rifle, waits.

The White Commonwealths

To-morrow unregarded, clean effaced
    The lesson of unhallowed yesterday,
We rail against each other; interlaced
    Albeit are our fortunes. So we stray,
        Blind to the lurid writing on the wall,
        Deaf to the words Fate's warning lips let fall.

(1899)

BY VELDT AND KOPJE

THE LEPERS

"All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be."—LEVITICUS xiii. 46.

I

THE Magistrate sat in his office, deep in thought. Before him, on his desk, lay a pile of documents of foolscap size—clinical reports as to some forty odd natives in the district, who had been cursed by God with the most bitter of all curses—the disease of leprosy. The Magistrate noted that the documents were livid white in colour—a variation from the orthodox blue of the ordinary printed form, and even this trivial circumstance seemed to have an unpleasant significance.

It was a month since the receipt of the circular from the Government, directing that the long-dormant "Leprosy Repression Act" be put in force, and the District Surgeon had, in the interval, been busy riding from kraal to kraal in these locations where the disease existed, obtaining the voluminous data required in each individual case. This data

had now been transferred to the fateful livid forms, the imposing pile of which the Magistrate was regarding with troubled eyes.

In response to a touch upon the bell a smart-looking native constable entered the room, and a message sent through him brought Galada, sergeant of the native police, and four of his men, who stood before the desk in an attentive line. After the Magistrate's order had been explained to them, Galada and his men left the room, went to where their horses stood, ready saddled, and rode forth respectively in five different directions. The sun was shining brightly. The season was early summer, but a light, refreshing breeze was making glad the land. The previous day had been hot, but a short thunderstorm at sunset had cleared the atmosphere and lowered the temperature, so the morning was sweet, as only a South African morning can be when cool, sea-born wind and gently ardent sunbeams flatter and caress.

Galada, the sergeant, took his course along the footpath which leads over the bush-covered "Black-water" Ridge. To his right arose, in precipitous terraces, the noble mass of the Umgano Mountain. The valleys were full of long lush grass, on which the sleek-limbed kine were greedily browsing. The long-tailed finches lilted over the reeds in anxious pursuit of their short-tailed, and therefore more nimble, mates; the crested lories called hoarsely from the mysterious depths of the jungle.

As the Sergeant reached the higher slopes of the ridge, the late flowers of retreating spring became

more and more plentiful. The pink shields clustering around the orchid stems were full of struggling bees half-smothered in yellow pollen, while over each golden mass of mountain-broom a small cloud of butterflies hovered. Around the towering crags wheeled the chanting falcons, whose wild cries seemed to voice the very spirit of the mountain wilderness.

But Galada had neither eye nor ear for these things; his thoughts were almost wholly engrossed by the "beer-drink" which he knew was that day being held at the kraal of Headman Rolobèlè—an hour's ride away—among the foot-hills of the Drakensberg Range. He knew that there he would find all the headmen to whom he had to convey the Magistrate's message, as well as other good company, and an excellent brew of beer. Thus would be afforded a most fortunate opportunity of combining business and pleasure.

When Galada arrived at his destination he found the "beer-drink" in full swing. The men were all sitting in a circle before the main entrance to the cattle kraal, which was half-surrounded by a crescent of beehive-shaped huts. In the centre stood several immense earthenware pots full of the pink liquor, while several smaller pots, each with a cleft-calabash spoon floating in it, were circulating among the guests. Galada removed the saddle from his horse, let the animal loose to join the horses of the other visitors—which were being herded by a couple of boys. Then, after greeting the giver of the feast, he joined the circle of drinkers.

But the Sergeant was far too sensible a man to allow pleasure to interfere with duty to his own disadvantage, so after quenching his immediate thirst by emptying one of the largest of the secondary pots, he drew Rolobèlè and the other headmen aside for the purpose of communicating to them the Magistrate's message, while all were yet in a state of sobriety.

"This, then, is the word of Government," said he. "The people who have 'the sickness' (the Kaffirs have no name for the disease of leprosy) are to be gathered together at Izolo. From thère they will be sent on in wagons to Emjanyana, where they will henceforth dwell. The Magistrate tells me to warn you that this word is a word which must be listened to and obeyed."

The four headmen looked at each other in silence for awhile. Then Rolobèlè spoke—

"Yes, we knew of the coming of the word and we will obey. With the old men and women there will be no difficulty, but with the young men—the son of Makanda, for instance—he will be a difficult bull to drive into the Emjanyana kraal."

"What! Makanda's son, Mangèlè," exclaimed Galada in a tone of surprise; "he that I saw among the drinkers; has *he* got it?"

"Oh, yes," replied Rolobèlè. "The doctor was here last week and found 'the sickness' in his hand and his knee. But you knew, surely, that his mother died of it three years ago."

Across the heavy features of the youngest of the headmen—a man named Xaba—the ghost of a smile

seemed to flit. Xaba had quite recently been appointed to the headmanship in succession to his father. There was enmity and jealousy between him and Mangèlè. Both had been paying their addresses to the same girl, and the suit of Mangèlè had prospered. He had, as a matter of fact, already paid more than one instalment of the "lobola"[1] cattle, and the wedding was expected to take place within a few months.

After giving full instructions as to the collection of the unfortunate sufferers, Galada, accompanied by the others, returned to the beer-feast with a clear conscience. After removing his uniform to prevent its getting soiled, he borrowed a blanket from Rolobèlè and gave himself up to enjoyment.

Mangèlè was the "great son" of his father, who was so old and infirm that he slept away his days and took no further interest in life. When the weather was cold he lay all day long on his mat next to the fireplace in his hut—a little boy being always on duty to prevent the fire either going out or setting the old man's mat or blanket alight. In mild weather he lay outside in the open. When the sun stung he sought the shady side of the hut, and groaned grievously when the pursuing sunbeams forced him to shift his quarters.

Makanda was a rich man, and, as the greater portion of his riches belonged to his "great house," such would, consequently, fall to Mangèlè. The latter had many half-brothers who were older than

[1] The dowry paid by the bridegroom to the bride's father after the manner of the ancient Spartans.

himself, but, his mother having been the "great wife," he took precedence of the rest of the family.

A few years previously Mangèlè's mother, who had been afflicted with leprosy for many years, died miserably. Mangèlè, when little more than a boy, had quarrelled with his father and run away from home, meaning to return no more. He wandered far and near—sometimes working at the docks at Cape Town or East London—sometimes at the gold or diamond mines. The love of home is always very deep in the Kaffir, and Mangèlè came to find the longing to return to his father's kraal so strong, that he could no longer withstand it. For some months previously he had suffered from a feeling of painful weakness in his left hand and wrist, which had made it difficult for him to use pick or shovel.

Upon his return Mangèlè found that his mother had died recently, and that his father had become very feeble in mind and body. But the old man welcomed him with open arms. Makanda had been badly treated by his other sons, who, after the fashion in such cases, had begun to despoil him of his property in the most barefaced manner. Soon after his "great son's" return old Makanda formally abdicated the headship of the family in his favour and thenceforth spent most of his days and all his nights in peaceful, dreamless slumber.

Mangèlè's hand became weaker and weaker. He found that he could not exert it in the least degree without suffering dull, gnawing pain for days afterward. Then the hand began to swell and the knuckles became distorted. Shortly after this a

weakness, followed by a swelling, appeared in the left knee.

A cloud seemed to settle down upon his face, and his features gradually took on that strange, pathetic, and by no means repellent, look which one so often sees in strongly marked cases of tubercular leprosy before the frightful disfiguring stage has set in. This look distinctly suggests the face of a lion in repose. In strongly marked cases the resemblance cannot fail to strike the most careless observer. There is nothing in it suggestive of ferocity, but rather of a deep, dignified, and sombre sadness, with a touch of that sublimity which belongs to everything that appalls.

Mangèlè knew well that he was smitten with the incurable disease of which his mother had died. He became solitary in his habits and would sometimes sit on a stone outside his hut the whole night through. And the sombre, leonine look deepened upon his face with the passing of the months.

At first Mangèlè had, as is usual in such cases among the Kaffirs, put down his own as well as his mother's illness to the malevolence of an enemy, and believed that if he could counteract the spell woven against him, he would recover his health, but he no longer deceived himself on this score. The Kaffirs are, as a rule, utterly ignorant of Nature's laws as such affect the human body, but Mangèlè was intelligent to a degree far above the average of his race. Moreover, his sojourn among the Europeans had given him enlightenment. Recently the dire significance of his situation had struck him to

the heart. Now and then he would appear among his fellows at a "beer-drink" or other function, but as a rule he remained at home and brooded in solitude over his doom.

A Kaffir "beer-drink" is a very curious and distinctive feature of South African native life. One peculiarity of the "beer-drink" is that the drinkers pass through several definite stages corresponding with the amount of their potations. In the earlier the utmost good-humour prevails. Soon, however, comes a period of boasting which, if different clans are represented at the gathering, shortly changes into one electric with possibilities of strife, for vaunting leads to irritation, recrimination, and eventual blows.

A fierce quarrel may arise from something utterly trivial; any two men present who dislike each other never being at a loss for a *casus belli.* The mere mention of an old garden dispute, or a lawsuit of half a century back between the respective grandfathers of two men who have reached the critical point, is quite enough to set the sticks whirling. Indeed, beer seems to act like a kind of sympathetic ink in bringing every ancient and half-obliterated grievance to the surface.

After the quarrelsome stage succeeds one of torpor, and from this the revellers arise with appetites which only meat, and plenty of it, can assuage. Then, unless the giver of the feast be rich and liberal enough to kill for his guests, the flocks and herds of the stock-owners in the vicinity are apt to suffer.

The stage of boasting had been reached when

Galada and the headmen returned to the banquet. On different sides men were declaiming loudly of the wealth and greatness of their relations, ancestral and contemporary—several talking at the same time. Galada's eye at once sought out Mangèlè, the son of Makanda, who had just been mentioned to him as being a leper. Mangèlè was a most splendid specimen of manhood. As he lay naked on his blanket in the bright sunshine, his splendid torso and muscular limbs seemed to be the very embodiment of health and reposeful strength. Looking more closely, however, the Sergeant was able to notice the signs of the disease which had been mentioned by Rolobèlè. Superficially, all that was wrong with the knee was a slight thickening on the outside—so slight, indeed, that Galada would certainly never have noticed the thing had his attention not been drawn to it. Mangèlè's left hand was, however, distinctly swollen and distorted. He kept it concealed as much as possible, hiding it under a fold of the blanket he lay upon.

Mangèlè's voice was not heard among those of the boasters. He lay silent and abstracted, slightly apart from the others, drinking deeply and apparently taking no notice of the Babel around him. For an instant he looked up as Xaba joined the circle, and the glances of these two seemed to flash at each other like spears. Then Mangèlè took another long draught of beer and bent his head lower than before.

"We of the Radèbè," shouted 'Mzondo, a fierce-looking savage, who had a heavy ivory armlet above

his left elbow, "hau—there are none like us; we are the black cattle of the pastures. My father was a bull with a strong neck and I am his calf. Look at our sticks in a fight—look how the strangers come to seek our daughters in marriage. Wau—but we are a race of chiefs—a great people."

"We of the Amahlubi," shouted one 'Mbulawa, "were never tillers of the fields of the Amagcaleka, nor were our daughters taken as concubines by the sons of Hintza. We were bulls when the Radèbè were oxen."

At this reference to the captivity of the Radèbè, half a century previously, all present of that clan leaped to their feet and seized their sticks. Rolobèlè, however, managed to restore tranquillity. The majority of those present were Hlubis. The headman rebuked 'Mbulawa for his rudeness. Then, in the course of a long and eloquent speech, he adroitly led the thoughts of his guests to an episode in which both clans had equally covered themselves with glory. Thus was the anger appeased and the danger of a breach of the peace averted for the moment.

Xaba, who had for some time been drinking heavily in silence, began to dispute with one Fodo over the merits of some old family quarrel which had been settled many years previously. The sombre eye of Mangèlè followed every gesture of his enemy. Fodo was a small man, and Xaba, who in spite of his size was rather cowardly, began to address him in most insulting terms. Suddenly Mangèlè sprang to his feet, seized his sticks, and

strode across the circle toward the bully. Xaba drew back before his assailant, while a number of Mangèlè's friends threw themselves in his course and prevented him from reaching his enemy.

Under the Territorial Law, the giver of a beer-party is responsible for any breach of the peace that may occur at it. This circumstance, and the fact of the Sergeant's presence, impelled Rolobèlè to strain every nerve to prevent fighting. After some difficulty the two furious men were forced away in different directions; they, all the time, shouting insult and defiance at each other. At length Xaba called out—

"You—bull with the water in your bones—your days are over. To-morrow you will be tied up with the sick oxen at Emjanyana. If you do not believe me, ask Galada. Good-bye; I am now going to see Nosèmbè."

Mangèlè at once ceased from shouting and struggling, and allowed himself to be led away without resistance. His head was bent, and his heavy, leonine features set themselves into a sombre, tragic mask, out of which his eyes seemed to blaze.

II

On the day after the transmission of the Magistrate's message the different headmen concerned went round among their respective locations and warned the lepers to assemble at a certain spot near Izolo in ten days' time. Mangèlè received the message in silence. His relations, who hated him

for having prevented their spoliation of old Makanda, were delighted at the prospect of getting rid of him, but they wisely refrained from expressing their feelings on the subject in his presence.

Nosèmbè and Mangèlè were attached to each other in a manner somewhat rare among the uncivilised natives. She was the handsomest girl in the neighbourhood, and several other men besides Xaba had wished to marry her. She had never suspected for a moment that her lover was suffering from the dread, nameless disease that filled the bones with water, and when in the course of the next few days it came to be whispered that Mangèlè was one of those who had to go into confinement at Emjanyana, she laughed at the report. Later, Xaba spoke of it to her and she spat at him in her fury at the insult. When, however, she heard her father and brothers discussing the question of the return of the dowry cattle, she knew that the rumour was true, and her whole soul revolted at the injustice. Mangèlè was the strongest and handsomest man in the neighbourhood—why should he be locked up like a criminal because he happened to have a sore place upon his hand? She at once made up her mind that if her lover had to go, she would follow him into captivity.

Three days Nosèmbè waited in the hope that Mangèlè would visit her, but she waited in vain; so, on the fourth night, she arose from her mat after all the others had gone to sleep, crept out of the hut, and sped along the pathway which led over the divide beyond which his kraal was situated.

The night was sultry and the sky was brightly starlit as Nosèmbè glided between the patches of scrub which dappled the hillside at the back of the kraal. She knew the hut which Mangèlè occupied by himself; all she feared was that the dogs might give the alarm and some of the people come out and see her. As she crouched behind a bush the dogs suddenly set up a chorus of barking and rushed down the hillside on the opposite side of the kraal in pursuit of a supposed enemy. Here was her chance; she sprang up and ran swiftly down the slope to Mangèlè's hut.

Mangèlè was sitting on a stone in front of the doorway, in an attitude expressive of the deepest dejection. His head was bowed upon the arms which rested upon his bent knees, and the corner of his blanket was drawn over it as though he could not bear even the light of the gentle stars. He heard Nosèmbè's footstep, and lifted his sombre face. For a few seconds the two regarded each other silently; then the girl flung herself to the ground at the man's feet and broke into a passion of tears.

Mangèlè lifted Nosèmbè from where she lay and clasped her closely to him. Her sobs ceased, but it was long before either spake a word. The girl was the first to break the silence.

"It is not true that you have to go to Emjanyana."

"It is true."

"But you are not sick," she rejoined, passionately. "You are stronger than other men. And

you have done no wrong. How, then, can they put you in prison?"

"I am sick," he replied, in a heart-broken voice; "my bones are filling with water. It is right that I go away. I am a dead man."

"Then I will go with you."

"No, that cannot be," he replied, in a voice broken by emotion; "no woman can go to Emjanyana unless she have 'the sickness'; and then the men and women have to dwell apart."

"*Moimamo*," she wailed. "You cannot leave me—your child quickens even now. You have paid the dowry and I am your wife. I will sit at the gate at Emjanyana until they let me in."

Day was almost breaking when Mangèlè led Nosèmbè back into the scrub to the footpath by which she had come. They bade each other farewell, after arranging to meet on the following night in the same way.

Nosèmbè had not gone very far before she met her father and two of her brothers, who, when they had discovered her absence, guessed where she had gone to and started out to seek for her. She met their railing and reproaches with the utmost composure. However, when night again came she found herself so carefully guarded that escape was impossible, so she was unable to keep the appointment with her lover.

Mangèlè waited the whole night through, hoping against hope that she would come. He correctly guessed the cause of her absence. When day broke he took his sticks and went forth to carry out a

design he had formed in the course of his long vigil.

During the next forty-eight hours he personally visited every one of the lepers belonging to his clan in the district, and arranged with them to meet a day later in the vicinity of the Residency.

In the morning, just after the Magistrate had reached his office, he received a message asking him to meet the lepers under a certain tree, where, by tacit understanding, they had been accustomed to assemble on the rare occasions when they required to communicate direct with the authorities. Soon afterward he walked to the spot, which was situated in a kloof about three hundred yards distant.

There they sat, twenty-four in number. Ten of them were women. All, with the exception of Mangèlè, were old. What an awful spectacle they afforded, these four-and-twenty human creatures ; all save one crushed almost out of human semblance by the wheels of the chariot of pitiless, unregarding Nature. There, against the lovely background of graceful fern and fragrant clematis, beneath the twinkling, poplar-like leaves of the spreading erethryna-tree—through which the blue sky smiled —were huddled these poor sufferers without hope of relief, guiltless vessels marred by the mysterious hand of The Great Potter. Twisted limb and crumbling stump, visages from which the gracious human lines had been obliterated by a slow, fell process more awful than the snake's fang or the lightning's stroke.

Over what remained of nearly every countenance

seemed to hover a suggestion of that strange, leonine look which was so strongly marked in the case of Mangèlè ; and to the Magistrate it seemed as if this were the only relief from a horror almost too absolute to look upon for long and keep his senses. It was as though what Schopenhauer called "the genius of the genus" had arisen from the depths of being to protest mutely against this piteous desecration of its temple by unregarding Nature and iron-visaged Fate. It was the very sublimation of tragic pathos, in the presence of which pity seemed to die of its own intensity.

All but Mangèlè sat upon the ground and endeavoured to hide, so far as possible, their worst individual disfigurements, but he stood forth as though proudly conscious of his almost perfect symmetry, and met the Magistrate's sympathetic glance with his sombre, lion-like gaze. Then, after the usual salutations, Mangèlè began his speech. As is usual with natives to whom oratory is an inborn art, his delivery was excellent and full of dignity.

"We, men and women who are dead, though living, come to our Father, the Government, to ask for a little thing.

"God, whom the White Man has taught us to know, smote us with this sickness which has filled our bones with water for marrow, and caused our quick flesh to rot slowly, like dead wood. We acknowledge that it is only right we should be separated from other men, so that we may not give the disease to those who are clean, but we cannot

dwell apart from our kindred, our cattle and the fields wherein our fathers saw the corn growing when they were little children—therefore we wish to die now, this day. Then will the sickness die with us, and our Father, the Government, will not be put to any further trouble on our account.

"What we ask of the White Chief, our Magistrate, is this: that he now, before the sun has begun to fall, send hither his policemen with rifles, and bid them shoot us skilfully so that we may suffer little pain."

Then turning to his companions, who had heard him in silence, he added—

"My brothers and sisters—children of my Father—tell our Chief if I have spoken the right word."

An eager murmur of assent followed.

"Yes, our Chief, he has spoken the one word which is in all our hearts: kill us here, but send us not to dwell apart from our homes and our kindred."

It was some little time before the Magistrate was able to command his feelings sufficiently to admit of his speaking. When they saw that he was about to reply, his miserable hearers leant forward with every appearance of the keenest interest. In his heart he knew that what the poor creatures asked for was for them the best. His compassion was so deep that he could have slain them with his own hand.

"The word you have spoken," he said, "has gone through my heart like the bullet you have asked for. What can I say for your comfort? Go, my poor brothers and sisters whom God has afflicted

so sorely. In the place to which your Father, the Government, is sending you, neither hunger nor cold will afflict you; you will have many friends and your days will be passed in peace. The thing you ask for I may not give, for the Law allows it not. My heart will be with you in your exile."

Then a wail of anguished protest went up from the miserable crowd—

"Law—what have we to do with the Law—we who are dead already? We cannot dwell in a strange place. Kill us and put us under the ground on which we have lived our lives. Send the policemen with the rifles to us here at this spot—we will not shrink."

After the Magistrate had withdrawn, the poor creatures continued their lamentations for some time. Then they seemed to fall into a condition of apathy. Mangèlè sat silently apart, with the corner of his blanket drawn over his head. This, of late, had become his habitual attitude. Eventually he arose and called for attention—

"Listen, O brothers and sisters of the sickness; the thing which the Magistrate may not do on account of the Law we may yet do for ourselves. . . . To-morrow night at sundown let us meet at the Wizard's Rock. There we may die as painlessly as by a rifle. To-day and to-morrow let us look our last upon our kindred, our cattle, and the land our fathers dwelt in. To-morrow night we will go down with the sun.

III

The Wizard's Rock derives its name from the circumstance that in the old days—before the advent of civilised government—it was the place of execution of those hapless creatures who were condemned for the supposed practice of witchcraft.

Before the rule of the European in South Africa there was, among the natives, a strong recrudescence from time to time of the lamentable belief that the land was full of malevolent wizards and witches, who spent most of their time in weaving deadly spells against man and beast. The consequences were terrible ; men and women were put to death upon the flimsiest suspicion ; torture of the most horrible kind was freely resorted to, and the wildest confession wrung from the agonised lips of some was taken as absolute confirmation of the most preposterous apprehensions.

Not more than thirty years ago many a dolorous procession wended its way up to this jutting peak, from the base of which, hundreds of feet below, a slope, covered with noble forest, fell away to a deep and rapid river. The doomed wretch would be blindfolded and placed, standing, at the edge of the precipice. Then the executioner would deal him a smashing blow on the side of the head with a heavily knobbed stick, and thus hurl him into the abyss.

Among the broken rocks below, the curious may, even at this late day, find fragments of human bones. The place has an evil reputation ; no native boy cares to go near it ; no bribe would in-

duce one to visit it alone. Now and then a few of the bolder spirits, finding themselves in the forest, make an excursion to the foot of the great rock, but they steal along breathlessly from tree to tree and from stone to stone, taking cover at each and listening fearfully lest the restless "imishologu"—the spirits of the wicked ones who have died violently—should be unseasonably awake. Then the fall of a dead bough, the rush of a troop of monkeys through the branches, the slightest unfamiliar echo from the beetling crag, will send them flying toward the open in speechless terror, with ashen-grey faces and staring eyes. Afterward they will boast loudly to their friends of the bravery evinced in the visit, omitting, of course, all reference to the invariable panic.

The day following the assembling of the lepers at the Magistracy died splendidly. To seaward the milk-white thunderclouds which marked the track of the monsoon towered into the deep azure, and when the sun began to sink behind the great mountain range to westward, every stately vapour-turret took on a changing glory, while in the inky vaults between incessant lightnings played.

Since early in the afternoon the poor lepers had been laboriously ascending the mountain by the different footpaths. Many were hardly able to hobble, but these were assisted by others whose legs were not so badly affected. Mangèlè bore upon his broad back an old man whose feet had completely crumbled away. Leaving this poor creature at the summit, he returned and helped the weaker among

the others to ascend. The sun was still some little distance above the horizon when the last of the self-doomed band sank panting at the edge of the cliff. Of the four-and-twenty who had come to the Residency to interview the Magistrate, twenty had assembled at the Rock. The others, three women and a man, had felt their courage fail them, so had decided to accept their less violent, though dreaded, fate and go to Emjanyana.

'Mpofu, the oldest of the men, dragged his shapeless frame to a stone, against which he leant, supporting himself by his stick at the same time. He trembled violently and made several attempts before he succeeded in speaking. Then his voice came in a husky quaver. The others turned toward him with an air of expectancy.

"It is," he said, "a long time since I last stood on this spot. I was then hardly a man; Hintza was Chief. We came here to look upon the killing of Gungubèlè, who was 'smelt out' for having bewitched his elder brother. I leant my head over the edge of the rock and listened for the thud of his body as it struck the stones, far down. I thought the wind had borne it away, but at length it struck me like a club. Many seasons have since passed, but that sound has ever since been in my ears. And now—when my body falls"—

A shudder passed through the crouching creatures; one or two of the women began to whimper and a few near the verge drew back with looks of terror. Mangèlè sprang to his feet.

"What is this?" he cried in an angry voice;

"has 'the sickness' filled your heart as well as your bones with water, O 'Mpofu, my father? Is yours the voice that calls dogs thirsty for death back from the fountain? Was it not your word that made me the leader of this army of dead men who are yet alive—and will you now turn them back on the day of battle? Shame on you. Listen to me, oh, my brothers, and not to this old man whose heart shrinks because of a sound he heard on a day before we were born. I am young, and death is more bitter to the young than to the old. My kraal is full of cattle; the dowry has been paid for my bride, yet I stand here to-day and am not afraid to die. Listen now to a new word in a strange tongue, but a word which you nevertheless may understand if you will:

"For a long time I have known that my sickness was like your own—the sickness that no doctor can cure. Through the long nights, when others slept, I have sat alone under the stars, and the voices of the darkness have taught me many things. Now, the greatest and strangest of these things was this: that I loved you who have suffered through your long lives what I am but beginning to suffer, and it is out of that love that I have brought you here to-day to put an end to your pain. Out of the darkness came another strange word—a word which has taught me how to die, to die with my eyes open; but I could not bear to die and leave you helpless in the pain you have endured so long. All this is the wisdom which I have learned from those voices of which the darkness is full."

When Mangèlè ceased speaking his hearers broke

out into loud wailing. One of the women crept shrinkingly to the verge of the precipice, glanced over the edge, and drew back with a shriek. Then she covered her face with her blanket and lay upon the ground, grovelling. The others, who had silently watched her, broke into renewed and terror-stricken wails as she drew back. Mangèlè once more began to speak, a note of thunder in his voice; all at once shrank into silence.

"This will I do for the sake of the love I bear you, and for that ye know not your own minds, nor what is good for you; this will I do because my heart is strong where yours is weak: I will hurl you one by one over the rock and then follow you myself. Look your last upon the sun, oh my brothers and sisters whom I love, for you are about to die."

At this the wretched creatures grovelled about Mangèlè's feet, beseeching him to spare their lives. They would, they said, go to Emjanyana and live peacefully like cattle in the kraal of their father, the Government. Their hearts were full of water; they were old and weak. They would not have minded death by shooting, at the Residency, but this was an evil place which bore a bad name from the most ancient days. The House of Death was cold and the road to it, over the steep cliff and the sharp stone beneath, painful. Even though they were sick they still could feel the warmth of the sun. If he loved them, let Mangèlè leave them until Death came of his own accord and sought them out.

Mangèlè stood with bent head in the middle of the prostrate crowd and listened to their piteous

pleadings. When at length he lifted his face a change had come over it—a wistful, transfiguring gentleness had taken the place of the look of stern indignation it had borne when he last spoke. Silencing the wailing creatures with a gesture, he said :

"Peace, peace ; your words have made me weak. Live, then, since you fear to die."

Mangèlè stepped from among the crouching throng and took his stand on the very verge of the cliff. The sun was just about to disappear ; its last level beams swept across the world and seemed to search out and reveal every noble curve and graceful line in the ebon limbs and trunk of the splendidly proportioned man who was about to destroy his beauty to save it from loathsome decay—they lit the noble face and head until these took on a sublime look of leonine anguish and the sombre eyes seemed to glare a tremendous indictment against Nature and Fate.

"Farewell, brothers and sisters who have not been taught how to die. Tell the girl Nosèmbè that my thoughts were of her as I sped to the sharp rocks."

As he spoke the last word Mangèlè sprang backward over the cliff. Old 'Mpofu and a woman shut their eyes and bent their heads sideways toward the verge. A few seconds afterward a heavy thud from below smote on the ears of all. A low groan broke from their lips—

A sound of approaching footsteps and laboured breathing was heard, and just afterward a tall young woman stepped in among the huddled throng. It was Nosèmbè, who, having heard a rumour of the

impending tragedy, hastened to join the man she loved and die with him.

"Ho, ye who are here," she said, after her eye had swept around the circle, "how is it then that your leader has not come? But there is his blanket and his stick; speak; where is Mangèlè, my lover?"

No one dared to answer; all sank their faces to the earth.

"Ha!" Nosèmbè cried, "I see the truth ye dare not speak—he is dead and ye are not ashamed to be alive. . . . He waits for me. . . . I take him his unborn child."

Then, with a long, shrill call upon her lover's name, Nosèmbè leaped into the abyss.

. . . . . .

Shortly after these events, on a day that was a dream of beauty, a couple of wagons drawn by long teams of oxen crossed the Lunda Divide by the road to Emjanyana. In the wagons were seated those of the lepers who were unable to walk. Hobbling after them came the rest, a dreary band, their heads bent, their whole appearance suggestive of stolid and hopeless misery. None attempted to turn back. They had attained the calm of consent.

When the top of the divide was reached the drivers called a halt for the purpose of breathing the oxen. The poor lepers gazed back long and lovingly at the valleys wherein they had dwelt all their lives and which they never more would see.

No tear was shed; not a word was spoken; not a sigh or a groan broke the silence. The police

who formed the escort had dismounted for a space at the side of the road.

After a few minutes Sergeant Galada signed to the drivers to proceed, and the wagons rumbled heavily down the slope. The lepers sat on the ground, still gazing backward, and seemingly unconscious that the wagons had gone forward.

Then the policemen came up and gently—very gently—urged the exiled and disinherited creatures to continue their journey.

THE WRITING ON THE ROCK

A FEW years ago I happened to be detained for several weeks in a somewhat remote village in the Cape Colony. Having very little to do I availed myself of an invitation received from a certain Boer named Jacobus van der Merwe—to visit his farm for the purpose of shooting.

The farm, "Honey Krantz," was about twenty miles away; it lay in the midst of the grandest mountain scenery. The only road was a very rugged one along the course of a devious gorge, with frequent crossings of a brawling stream. Each of the many sharp turns was marked by an immense rock-buttress, hundreds of feet in height. The mountainous sides of the gorge were thickly strewn with mighty boulders, whilst here and there wide moraines extended from summit to base.

I at once became very much interested in the members of the household. My host was about forty-five years of age and, even for a Boer, extremely stout. In fact he was obliged to excuse himself, on the score of his size, from accompanying me to the hunting-grounds, which lay so high that reaching them involved considerable and steep climbing. Accordingly, an alert-looking Hottentot was assigned to me as after-rider and guide. This "boy" knew every corner of the great mountain mass and was

thoroughly familiar with the haunts and habits of the game.

Mrs van der Merwe was almost as stout as her husband, who was also her cousin. It was, however, evident that when young she must have possessed great beauty. The house was full of children; these were of all ages and they strongly resembled each other in appearance. All were blue-eyed, flaxen-haired and rosy-cheeked. There was one grown-up daughter—Gertrude—a girl of eighteen. She only lacked animation to be a most beautiful woman. Her dead-gold hair lay in a dense mass upon her shoulders; her calm, deep eyes of a most tender blue were set beneath a broad, smooth, white brow; her teeth were dazzlingly white and her face pure oval in shape.

It was just after sundown when I arrived at the homestead. Supper over, I was invited to visit Sarel van der Merwe—the old, blind grandfather—who had not left his room for many years. I found him sitting in a very large home-made chair, with his feet upon a wooden stool containing a pan of charcoal. His bulk was huge; in fact, he was, probably, the biggest man I had ever seen. He had a long white beard and a mass of silvery hair. On a table, within reach of his hand, were several pipes and a large tobacco-pouch—the latter made out of a portion of the stomach of a sheep, brayed. Close to his feet a diminutive Hottentot crouched upon a sheep-skin. The face of this creature was old-looking and monkey-like. His duties were to attend to the old man's needs; more especially to

hold a burning coal, when required, to the often-replenished pipe. This he did with a skill evidently born of long practice—picking up the glowing lumps in his naked fingers with the utmost unconcern.

The room was comfortably furnished; almost everything in it appeared to be home-made. There were no blankets on the bed, their place being taken by karosses made of the skins of the fat-tailed sheep. Unlike the other rooms, this one had no ceiling, the thatch being visible between the rafters. Upon the rafters lay a coffin, evidently, from its size, built to accommodate old Sarel's prospective mortal remnants.

I grasped the old man's outstretched hand. He retained mine for a few seconds, feeling first the palm, then the back and lastly the fingers carefully over. I looked the while into his eyes; these were clear and blue and gave no suggestion of blindness.

"You work your brain too much and your body too little," said he, dropping my hand. "Your mind travels without rest on an endless road."

I was somewhat startled; it was so unexpected and at the same time so tersely true.

"It is clear," I replied, "that you do not need eyes to see. My brain is busy turning out barren thoughts, like a mill grinding sawdust."

"When young, one runs after thoughts; but when you grow old the thoughts will come and wait, like servants, until you wish to use them."

"My thoughts are less like servants than like dogs hunting me to death," I replied.

"A dog will obey if he be trained; if you do not train him he will bite you."

"Yes, I can see that. But if you have let them grow big without using the whip—what then?"

"Watch and pray; call the Lord to your help and He will deliver you. When I was young I rioted in my pride; I called my strength my own and told God I could do without His help. Then He struck me with blindness, and I repented. For a season the thoughts I had bred tore at my soul, but I slew them after bitter combat. Now others of a different kind have taken their place."

It was amazing to find such philosophy in one of a class usually supposed to be both ignorant and illiterate. Here was one who had solved the Great Enigma, who was at peace with himself, who apparently thought strongly and with originality, and who, although stricken with a misfortune that might well bring despair, was probably happier than nineteen-twentieths of his fellow-creatures. There was no trace of self-righteousness about the man. The unmistakable seal of peace was upon him.

"If I could feel as you do," I replied, "I should not care whether I lived or died; I should know no fear. Can you not teach me how to put the house of my mind in order and to train my dogs?"

"That none can teach but yourself—your own soul—and then only when God touches you with His finger."

Shortly afterwards the family assembled for worship in the old man's room. He recited one of the Psalms and then offered up a prayer. His

language was very simple, but it breathed the most fervent Christianity. The servants of the household were present. Then, after bidding old Sarel "Good-night," all left the room but his son and the little Hottentot. These remained to assist him to bed.

It was evidently the practice of the household to retire early, so I went to my room at once. It was large and lofty. The snowy linen upon the great feather-bed looked tempting, and I felt a deep sense of satisfaction in sinking into the downy abyss.

My window looked out upon the valley; through the wide-open casement I could see the black rampart of mountain crested with twinkling stars. Here, if anywhere, one could realise—

> "The silence that is in the starry sky,
> And sleep that is among the lonely hills."

Shortly after daylight a most delicious cup of coffee was brought to my bedside; it was keen enjoyment just to lie and inhale the aroma, but the aroma was nothing to the taste.

Soon a weak shaft of sunlight touched the wall above my head, so I sprang up and went to the open window. The beauty of the scene was incomparable. To the southward arose the stark, rugged mountain mass which formed the culmination of the range—its topmost crags touched with gold; all else was clothed in a diaphanous purple veil; every hollow was brimming with mystery. Here and there a faint wreath of mist clung like departing sleep to the eyelids of the mountain. As I looked, the sun climbed

through a gap, and straightway the lesser summits grew golden.

Not a breath of the slightest breeze disturbed the sacred stillness. The only sound was the faint murmur from the distant stream foaming over the grey boulders at the bottom of the valley. From the stream the hillside sloped steeply up, dotted thickly with dark green trees. But an undercurrent of very real sadness flowed through all this beauty. I could not forget the blind man in the next room; did he ever recall this scene—which he must often have gazed upon—and repine? Although his peace seemed to be as deep and changeless as the vault of the blue sky, the memory must, surely, often strain his heart-strings.

I leant upon the window-sill and looked to the right. There I saw Gertrude standing, her dead-gold hair unbound, her pure, calm visage bathed in the sunlight. She appeared to gaze at the sun as unconcernedly as an eagle might have done. She afforded the one touch necessary to complete the harmony of the scene.

After an early breakfast I took my rifle and, accompanied by the Hottentot guide, went forth in search of game. The mountain was so steep that our ponies could only ascend by scarping, zigzag fashion. It took nearly two hours to reach the central plateau lying between the two highest summits of the range.

From here the view was superb; billow after billow seemed to surge away in every direction—each crested with a fringe of cliff like the foam of a breaking wave. Every now and then a faint cloud-

wreath would form around one or other of the higher crags, then float away to leeward like a tress, until dissolved by the sunshine.

Having shot a couple of rheboks, I felt disinclined for further slaughter, so laid myself down among the late mountain flowers and basked in the light. The heat was deliciously tempered by a steadily-streaming breeze. Thus were spent several hours.

It was only when the sun had sunk considerably in to the afternoon that I regretfully began to think of returning to the homestead. The ponies were grazing a short distance away, so after telling my after-rider to replace the saddles, load up the game and make his way homeward by the nearest available course, I took a bee-line on foot for the farmhouse.

My course led across the head of a gorge, the sides of which were steep, grassy slopes, interspersed with patches of moraine. Here and there immense angular fragments of stone—which had, ages back, slid down from the crowning cliffs—protruded from the earth. Passing one of these, something peculiar in its appearance caught my eye, so I approached more closely. Upon its flat face the following inscription had been roughly cut :—

"HIER WORDT EEN ZONDENAAR
BEKEERD."

Having thought much of old Sarel during the day, I involuntarily connected him with the strange inscription—"Here a sinner became converted." The letters were deeply carved into the stone, and

the way the dents were overgrown with lichen showed that the carving had taken place many years ago. Somehow the legend seemed quite congruous ; if a special revelation ever came from the Divine to the human, what place could be more appropriate for its happening than this—the undefiled heart of the everlasting hills, where the hand of man had as yet wrought no desecration? Like Moses before the Burning Bush, I felt as though standing upon holy ground.

I reached the homestead just as dusk was setting in. After supper I again went to pay my respects to old Sarel. He greeted me with cheerfulness—

"Well, they say no Englishman can shoot, yet I hear you killed two bucks to-day."

"Yes," I replied, "I killed two bucks, and I almost wish I had not done so. It seemed to be a sin to shed blood in such a place and on such a day."

Old Sarel turned his mild, inquiring, blind eyes upon me, but made no reply. We sat and smoked in silence for a while.

"Can you tell me anything about an inscription I saw upon a rock to-day—'Here a sinner became converted'?"

"Yes," he replied, after a pause, "I am the sinner. My son cut the words upon the stone at my wish."

I held silence, so he shortly afterwards asked—

"Would you like me to tell you of what happened?"

"Yes, I should be most grateful."

"I was born on this farm," he said ; "my father

was one of the first to take up land about here. When a young man, hunting was my passion. I made friends with the wild Bushmen who then dwelt on the mountain, and they used to drive the game for me. I built a hut near the spring just below the summit, and there I sometimes stayed for weeks together.

"I was proud of my eyesight and my skill with the rifle. I did not care for the society of others; I neglected my wife and children; I neither feared God nor regarded man. The mountain I looked upon as my home. Living so near the sky makes one different to others. The sins of the Flesh lose their breath and cannot climb so high, but those of the Spirit beset you sorely. You will remember that Satan tempted the Lord on the top of a high mountain.

"One day in summer, about forty years ago, I was riding across the head of the kloof where the stone stands whereon you read those words to-day. A thunderstorm was sweeping down from the north-west, but I took no heed, for I had never known fear of lightning nor anything else. The Bushmen were driving on a troop of elands, and I expected them to cross the saddle at the head of the kloof; so I left the horse concealed in a hollow and took my stand, with the rifle on my arm, at the foot of the rock.

"Soon the elands appeared; they ran for a short distance down the kloof, then halted just opposite where I was standing. One great bull stood apart from the others. As I lifted my rifle to take aim a flash leaped out of the cloud and struck the ground

close to where the bull was standing, igniting the grass. The animal sprang back in terror. I fired—and it rolled over, dead.

"Then I laughed aloud and shouted that my aim was more true than that of the Almighty. An instant afterwards the heavens opened and flame enveloped me like a sheet. I fell, senseless, to the ground.

"When I recovered I thought night had fallen. I could smell that my clothing was scorched, but I felt no hurt. The rain had ceased and I was conscious of a sensation of warmth. I still thought it was night, but night blacker than I had ever known. After a while I stood up and groped about in terror, for I now imagined that the end of the world had come and that the sun had been quenched. Then I heard a bird singing: I still wondered; but when I heard the Bushmen calling to me from the other side of the kloof, where the dead eland lay, the truth struck me in all its terror: I was blind.

"I shrieked and blasphemed as I staggered about. I found my gun and tried to shoot myself, but the lightning had twisted it as you might twist a handful of straw. The Bushmen led me down to the homestead.

"Afterwards, I spent many days and nights in hell, but the day arrived when my pride lay broken in the dust, and I came to acknowledge that God's Angel was sitting on that thundercloud, charged to save my soul."

That night I lay long awake, thinking of old Sarel's tale. I had a very clear recollection of the

inscribed stone and its surroundings, so tried to picture the tremendous episode of forty years back. The sultry summer day; the white thundercloud curdling into shape upon the hot north-western horizon and towering into the ether, until its spreading tentacles seemed to seize the world in a mighty grip. Later, the low muttering of thunder, pulsing from the monster's baleful heart, and the thin streak of fire darting out far in advance of the rain and igniting the dry grass. Then the blasphemous jest of the strong man proud of his skill. Lastly, the thunderbolt winged to smite but not to slay, touching not so much as a hair of the head of the defiant human atom, but crushing the gun in his hand as though it were a reed, and filling his eyes with such excess of light that nothing less vivid could stir their sense for evermore.

TOMMY'S EVIL GENIUS

"Greater love hath no man than this."—S. John xv. 13.

His name was Danster. His age might have been anything between fifteen and forty-five. His cheek-bones were high, and his eyes oblique like those of a Mongolian. Scattered unevenly over his bullet-shaped skull were thin tufts of wool, each culminating in a minute, solid pellet. His only clothing was a noisome sheep-skin kaross which had formerly belonged to a great-grandfather — long since deceased.

Danstér was a Hottentot—or rather what is called by that indefinite term at the Cape. In his much-mixed blood that of the Bushman evidently preponderated. An anthropologist would have valued his skull, which seemed to epitomise the results of a criminal ancestry extending through many generations.

Tommy, surnamed Winwood, was very different. He was a blonde, blue-eyed, yellow-haired lad of eight years of age, somewhat slight and undersized, but agile and capable of endurance when under the stimulus of excitement. Five children had nested in the Winwood nursery, but only Tommy survived. The others had all succumbed to congenital delicacy before reaching the age of seven. With Tommy the Winwoods had come to South Africa in the

early eighties, and had taken a farm near the coast in one of the eastern districts of the Cape Colony. Mr Winwood was a nervous, retiring man of literary tastes. Having enough money to live upon, his farming was hardly a serious pursuit. In fact he left the management of the place almost solely in the hands of a somewhat dour but conscientious Boer, who managed to run the concern at a profit.

Mrs Winwood suffered from extreme delicacy. She was an accomplished musician, but the climate had sapped her energy to such an extent that when the weather was warm she hardly ever touched the piano. When the days were cool, she often played for six or seven hours a day, and thus seriously overtaxed her strength. Both she and her husband were moody and morbid. Although much attached to each other, their life was a series of misunderstandings.

It may be imagined what a lonely life poor Tommy led. He received three hours' instruction every day—two from his father and one from his mother. His nursery was full of toys, but the very number and variety of these had rendered them valueless as a resource. The homestead stood on the steep south slope of a valley through which a stream ran between fringes of timber rooted in rich, fern-bearing soil, and commanded a grand view of interspersed forest and grassy slopes. But, unfortunately, snakes abounded, so poor Tommy was restricted to the cleared area immediately surrounding the house. So his face took on that expression

of pathos which haunts the looks of children debarred from the companionship of their kind.

When the tempter appeared Tommy fell an easy prey. Danster was a calf-herd. He, too, felt lonely. His avocations kept him in the vicinity of the homestead, so he soon found an opportunity of making friends with the lonely child. The intimacy grew, unnoticed by Tommy's parents, and was for some time tacitly acquiesced in. However, one day Mrs Winwood came upon the two sitting behind the big water-tank, and found Danster engaged in extracting the eyes of a living bird with a mimosa thorn, while Tommy looked on, fascinated. Danster was thereupon severely flogged by the overseer, under Mr Winwood's supervision, and earnestly warned never to show his ill-favoured face near the homestead again.

Tommy was a thoroughly truthful child. When questioned he freely admitted that the removal of the bird's eyes was the last of a long series of hideous vivisectional experiments at which he had assisted, and which had been organised for his delectation. Like most highly-strung people, Mr and Mrs Winwood were morbidly sensitive to physical suffering, either in themselves or in other sentient beings. The keenness of their distress may therefore be imagined. Horrible though the thing was, they took far too serious a view of it. In fact, they imagined that their child's character had been irreparably ruined.

Tommy had not realised how attached he was to the disreputable Danster until after the separation.

One night, about a week after the dreadful discovery, Tommy confessed to his mother that he loved Danster very much indeed. Soon he began to mope visibly. His father and mother were horribly annoyed at the turn things had taken. They always referred to Danster as their son's evil genius.

Something had to be done, so it was decided to employ a governess. In due course a highly certificated lady came to undertake the regeneration of Tommy's morals as well as the development of his mind. She had much erudition, but little sympathy, so Tommy and she were antipathetic towards each other from the very start, and the starved heart of the lonely child went out more and more towards the banished Danster.

Drought had lain heavily on the land for many months. The season was autumn. During early spring copious rains had fallen, but throughout sultry January and blistering February the heavens had been as brass and the wind as the blast from a furnace. The grass which had sprung up rank and luxuriant withered again, and now the farm, which was much under-stocked, lay like a clay potsherd covered with tinder.

One afternoon the sun smote the earth with more than usual fury. Away to the westward irregular fragments of thundercloud, which seemed incapable of cohering sufficiently to produce a storm, coquetted with the quivering mountain-tops. Ever and anon irregular gusts from the eastward would trail over glowing hill and gasping vale with a sound as though the tortured earth were sobbing an appeal to

the skies for the withheld mercy of rain. It was one of those days on which the beast seeks, gasping, for a cool lair, and the bird pants with half outstretched wings, deep in the densest foliage.

Mr and Mrs Winwood had collapsed completely; the governess retired to her darkened room; the servants had disappeared. Tommy only was awake. He tried all sorts of devices for passing the time, but the walls of his comparatively cool room became an irksome prison as the afternoon wore on; so he opened the glass door quietly, to avoid wakening his father in the next room, and stepped quietly on to the back stoep. Here he was in the shade. The air had taken on that suspicion of coolness which, in seasons of drought, nearly always tempers the afternoon.

Tommy leant upon the verandah rail, and the wind, as it stirred his yellow locks, seemed to be charged with some odour that stimulated his languid pulses. He sniffed at it wonderingly; what did it remind him of? Then he suddenly knew, and his cheek crimsoned with a guilty flush: it was the smell of Danster's kaross, its grosser elements subdued by distance, which assailed his nostrils.

Tommy cast his eyes around, and they fell upon an object which sent the blood coursing wildly through his veins. There, emerging from a bush only a few yards away, was the bullet-shaped head and Mongolian face of the Hottentot, his eyes filled with appeal and his wide mouth distended into a white-toothed smile. Tommy gazed spellbound, and the evil genius cautiously held out at arm's length a stick

from which a small water-tortoise hung by one tortured leg. After this had been dangled for a few seconds it was withdrawn and then the nest of a loxia was held forth. The loxia suspends its nest from boughs overhanging dark, forest-nurtured pools, and the nest has a long, woven tube, cunningly devised for the purpose of keeping out snakes, lizards and other enemies that prey upon the eggs and young of wild birds. Tommy had often gazed at these works of woven art as they hung from the whip-like acacia boughs, and had longed to possess one. A vision of the cool forest grot where he had seen them swaying in the wind arose in his mind. Duty was forgotten in an instant; Nature, like a long-banished king, came back and claimed his own. An old hat belonging to his father hung upon a nail close at hand. Hurriedly placing this upon his head he tripped down the steps into the garden and followed the beckoning tempter.

Tommy hurried after his evil genius along the pathway which led through the orchard down to the bottom of the valley. In passing, Danster skilfully snatched a supply of half-ripe peaches from the laden trees, and hid the loot in a fold of his odoriferous kaross. This grated on Tommy's sense of honour; his conscience lifted his head. To salve it, he mentally resolved not to eat any of the fruit.

They climbed over the orchard fence and pressed through the rustling Tambookie grass, which filled the air with its sharp, sweet scent. Then they reached the strip of forest at the bottom of the valley. From

the heart of its charmed mystery stole the delightful murmur of falling water.

Just where the pathway crossed the stream was a rocky ledge over which a thin gush of crystal water trembled down through the air and, smiting a boulder, resolved itself into fine spray. A vagrant sunbeam pierced this, and the miracle of a tiny rainbow hung over the pool. This is a phenomenon only seen in severe droughts, and when the sunlight smites through a gap in the greenery at a certain angle. The impressionable Tommy become intoxicated with delight ; the smell of Danster's kaross, which had always offended his sensitive nose, was forgotten. The evil genius became a wood-god and Tommy his humble votary.

The wind, heated once more to furnace pitch, moaned threateningly along the hillside, but here all was cool, grateful and quiet. The unruffled water slept beneath the shadowing trees from which, ever and anon, sounded the peevish twitter of drowsy birds. A large iguana slowly dragged its scaly length over the stones, pausing now and then to snap at an insect, which it swallowed, gulping solemnly. A flash of vivid blue seemed to fill the gloom—a kingfisher skimmed out of the darkness across the surface of the pool and perched on a stone. Quick as thought Danster flung his short, knobbed stick with unerring aim, and the bird fell, mangled, its bright plumage scattered over the surface of the crystal pool. This broke the spell. Grasping the dead bird in his hand, Tommy followed his evil genius across the stream and through the fringe of woodland on the other side.

Now came the main effort of the enterprise ; the steep, grassy hillside had to be climbed. Beyond, high up, stood the enchanted forest in the depth of which the red-winged, green-crested lories flitted with noiseless undulations from tree to tree or waked strident echoes with their hoarse-throated calls. There the satyrs of the South—the black-faced, green-backed monkeys—tore swinging along from bough to bough, scattering leaves, flowers and berries from sheer love of mischief. There the great woodland butterflies flitted like ghosts through the nether gloom or circled like fairies around the tree-tops. From there the raucous barking of the rutting bush-bucks sounded at midnight across the valley. There were hidden wonders—untold, transcendent—stinging imagination into ecstasy.

The hillside had once been covered with forest, but the timber had, on the lower slopes, disappeared under the blighting hand of man. Now the high, waving Tambookie grass lay thick upon it, and through this the path wound and zigzagged aimlessly, after the manner of South African footways. A stream had once flowed down the decline, but being no longer nurtured by the growth of timber, had shrunk to an underground trickle, the course of which was here and there marked by a funnel-shaped opening filled with bracken. Here a careful ear might discover the musical tinkle of semi-subterranean water.

Tommy became very tired, but pushed bravely on, following the lead of his evil genius. The air became hotter and hotter. A few belated cloudlets,

very high up, sailed slowly against the wind. From some of these a few heavy gouts of rain occasionally fell, only to be immediately evaporated by the glowing earth. Now and then a remote metallic clashing of thunder could be heard. A sudden and furious succession of gusts sprang up and joined in a mad whirl from eastward. This covered the hillside with dust, and sent leaves and twigs flying over the billows of the swaying grass.

Tommy looked longingly at the dense forest, which now lay but a couple of hundred yards ahead. The wind blew his hair bewilderingly into his eyes; the hot, acrid dust filled his throat. His legs trembled under him, but he still struggled bravely on. His evil genius stood between him and the worst of the gusts, and the unsavoury kaross proved an acceptable shield against the stinging missiles with which the air was filled.

At length a lull—but the wind was only pausing to gain strength for a burst of wilder fury. Then a dense cloud of dust and detritus arose to windward and advanced with a strident moan.

A small, solid-looking cloud hung above them, shaped like a pear. From this a thin blade of white lightning flickered down and ignited the grass to windward, just in front of the advancing tempest. Immediately the dustcloud closed down on the ignited spot; in an instant the hillside was a hell of roaring, whirling, leaping flame.

Danster did not hesitate for an instant. Dropping the tortoise, the loxia's nest and the stolen fruit, he seized Tommy by the hand and dragged him

swiftly back down the hillside towards the last of the subterranean openings they had passed. It was a race for life with the springing, vaulting flame, which was hurled onward by the wind in immense flakes, pausing for the fraction of a minute here and there as though to gain strength for the next leap. Soon it became apparent that the fire must win. Then a hissing tongue of flame darted out and cut the fugitives off from their goal.

Without pausing for an instant Danster denuded himself of his kaross, wrapped Tommy in it, and, picking him up, dashed naked into the fire with a wild yell, hurling himself and his burthen into the gulf beyond. They sank together into the burning mass of bracken, Tommy beneath and his evil genius above. Then the world went out for Tommy in a wild turmoil of heat, smoke, suffocation and crackling explosions.

The first thing that struck Tommy's awakening senses was a strong smell of burnt leather. He was lying in a mass of slimy ooze. After a violent struggle he sat up, his head piercing the charred kaross, which had been his shield against the devouring fire. He looked around him with smarting eyes. The sides of the depression in which he lay were jet-black, with here and there a thin whorl of smoke eddying upwards. The strong, amber-tinted sunshine dazzled him. Close by he noticed a pair of yellow, pain-shot eyes, with brown vertical slits. A wild cat with all its fur scorched off was painfully crawling out of the water. He felt a movement at his feet; a half-scorched snake was loosely coiled about

his ankles. He turned to look behind him, wondering where Danster was. . . . But what was that blackened, shrivelled, crackling mass contorted so horribly beside him among the charred stumps of the fern? Alas! it was the body of his evil genius, who had died in agony that Tommy might live.

Tommy staggered to his feet. Not so much as a hair of his yellow head had been touched by the fire. He climbed out of the hollow and fled down the blackened hillside, still holding the dead kingfisher in his hand.

THE WISDOM OF THE SERPENT

In the good old days in Southern Africa distinction of any kind on the part of a Kaffir was a decided subjective disadvantage. Any man among the southern Bantu tribes possessing to a remarkable degree such attributes as strength, valour in war, or skill in the hunting field, or who distinguished himself by any especially notable deed, was liable to be waylaid by the myrmidons of his chief and expeditiously killed. His skull would then be taken to the principal of the Royal College of Witch-doctors, who would fill it with a potion and give the gruesome cup to be quaffed by the head of the tribe just before dawn next morning at the gate of the calf-pen. It was held that the chief would thus acquire in a simple, easy, and expeditious manner the much envied qualities of the distinguished deceased.

Occasionally portions of such physical organs as were supposed to have been specially concerned in the distinguished man's supremacy in his particular line would be pounded up with the ashes of magical roots to form an ingredient of the potion. Like the phrenologist, who thought to localise certain faculties under various bumps upon the human skull, the Kaffir doctor inferred that different organs of the human body were respectively the seats of different

mental qualities, and, further, that it was possible to assimilate the latter through the digestive apparatus.

When the late Kreli, chief of the Gcaleka tribe, was a young man, he was thought to be somewhat dull and lacking in power of initiative, so a great council of the tribe was held to decide as to what should be done to improve the chief's understanding and sharpen his wits generally. After long and anxious deliberation the council decided that the best way to endow Kreli with the missing qualities was to cause him to drink a potion out of the skull of one of the councillors—an old man of great parts who had been an ornament to the tribal senate since long before the death of Hintza, Kreli's father. The proposition was carried by acclamation, there being only one dissentient. Certain rites had, however, to precede the killing, and during the celebration of these the distinguished possessor of the coveted skull managed to make his escape across the colonial boundary.

The elders, no doubt shocked at the want of patriotism displayed by their colleague, once more met, and it was then decided as an alternative to remove the first phalanx of the little finger of the young chief's left hand. That the operation had the desired effect there can be no doubt, for Kreli became astute in peace and valiant in war—facts which the British and Colonial Governments ascertained to their joint cost on several subsequent occasions. Since the date of that momentous operation every youth of the Gcaleka tribe has, on reaching a certain age, been similarly

mutilated, and several other tribes have adopted the same custom.

Half a century ago, more or less, a certain trader named John Flood had developed a flourishing business in the present district of 'Mqanduli, then, as now, the territory occupied by the Bomvana tribe. Flood was a man of keen business instincts. He had, at a time when no one else dreamt of doing such a thing, established a trading station in the very heart of independent Kaffirland. There being no competition of any kind, the surrounding tribes were solely dependent upon him for their supply of civilised goods, for the general use of which they rapidly acquired a taste. It was desperately hard work conveying the merchandise from Cape Colony through a very rugged and absolutely roadless country, but the large profit made quite justified the expenditure of labour and money. Beads, brass wire, iron hoes, and blankets were the principal lines in which this trader dealt. In exchange he obtained large herds of cattle, which he periodically despatched to the colonial markets.

The trading station consisted of three large huts of native make, one of which was used as a shop, the others being respectively the trader's sleeping apartment and kitchen. Flood had, of course, a native wife—a girl named Nolai, daughter of a petty chief in the vicinity. I regret to have to record that his domestic conditions were not quite satisfactory. Nolai happened to prefer a certain young man of her own race, who had wooed her in the days of her spinsterhood, but had been too poor to pay the number of cattle which her astute father had required

as dowry. Twice during the first year of her married life had Nolai absconded from the dwelling of her spouse, only, however, to be ignominiously brought back by her brothers. Had they failed in this duty a return of the dowry cattle would have been claimed by the deserted husband. Flood, as a matter of fact, would have much preferred the cattle to the uncongenial Nolai, but, apparently, her relations shared in this preference. He had serious thoughts of taking another and, as he hoped, more suitable wife. This, no doubt, he would have done had it not been for the python.

The trading station was situated near the boundary of the Gcaleka territory, the chief of which, Kreli, exercised suzerainty over and imposed tribute upon the chief of the Bomvanas. In the vicinity of the station was a large, dense forest full of noble timber and swarming with wild beasts.

Among the natives of those days certain animals were looked upon as Royal game, and the chiefs were as strict in enforcing their rights in this respect as ever was William the Conqueror or the Plantagenets. Each tribe had its special laws relating to this privilege, and some of these laws were very peculiar. Of course, different tribes selected different animals for this distinction, but among the Gcalekas and the various clans which acknowledged Kreli as their head, "Munyu," the python, was regarded as being more than ordinarily the special game of the paramount chief. As a matter of fact, pythons seldom ventured so far south as Gcalekaland, and it was probably the fact of their extreme rarity which accounted for these

creatures being so jealously reserved for the use of the highest in the land.

The gall is well known by witch-doctors to be the seat of fierceness in all animals. Matiwamè, chief of the destroying horde of Fetcani, drank the gall of every chief he slew, with the view of increasing that very liberal endowment of ferocity which nature had given him. Moreover, the gall of snakes is supposed not alone to endow the drinker thereof with ophidian rancour and malice, but to give immunity from the effects of snake-bite.

The wisdom of the serpent is proverbial among all the sons of Ham. Upon several grounds, therefore, a potion made of the gall of the King of Snakes is a thing much to be desired by any chief.

Should the chief have been fortunate enough to succeed in killing a python he would use the skull of the creature as a cup out of which to drink the potion. Nevertheless, the chief was by no means sorry if someone else, allowing his passion for sport to overcome his regard for the law, did the killing ; but in such a case he would cause the courageous sportsman to be killed as well for the purpose of obtaining *his* skull and gall. The two galls would then be mixed together, divided, and quaffed in equal parts out of the respective skulls of the python and the python's slayer.

The advantages of this arrangement must, of course, be obvious. At the expense of probably not more inconvenience than the average Briton undergoes in crossing from Dover to Calais when on his annual holiday, the chief would imbibe the wisdom,

the subtlety and the ferocity of the serpent, as well as the prowess of the mighty man who had conquered it. What, indeed, could be simpler or more satisfactory.

One fateful day in middle spring the trader happened to be riding along the edge of the big forest, looking for a horse which had strayed. He carried his double-barrelled gun, for guinea-fowl abounded, and he was desirous of shooting a couple for his supper. Suddenly his pony swerved wildly to one side with a violent snort, and John Flood measured his length upon the ground. The pony galloped homeward mad with fright.

The trader rose to his feet, recovered his gun and looked quickly in the direction of the spot from which his pony had recoiled in such terror. There he saw an immense python climbing sinuously and with deliberation into a large thorn-tree. The snake was so intent upon a monkey which sat, fascinated and rigid, in the upper branches, that it appeared to take no notice of the man. It was a monster, and had evidently quite recently sloughed its skin after the long winter's sleep, for its scales gleamed gloriously in the brilliant afternoon sunshine. Rhythmic muscular tremors ran up and down its coiling length, bringing the vivid brown, green, and golden patterns into changing prominence.

Flood, who was not wanting in either courage or coolness, watched his opportunity, and poured a charge of shot into the python's neck, just behind the head, at point-blank range. Then the monstrous creature crushed the branches of the tree like a wisp

in its death agony during one appalling minute, and the monkey, relieved from its fascination, made off into the forest with voluble chatterings, in which, no doubt, miscellaneously profane monkey language was mingled with uncomplimentary remarks about ophidians in general and pythons in particular.

John Flood, exceedingly stiff from the effects of his fall, obtained assistance and dragged his quarry home in triumph. The shop happened at the time to be surrounded by customers waiting patiently for the return of the proprietor. Through the medium of these the half of Bomvanaland was apprised of the doughty deed within a few hours. Among others who heard the important news was the head witch-doctor of the Bomvana chief, who at once sought an audience with his master. The chief was a young man who had as yet found no opportunity of distinguishing himself.

A council was at once called hurriedly together. The deliberations of this body were short but decisive. Within half an hour a strong body of armed men were on their way to the trader's, with strict orders to seize the carcase of the python at all costs and convey it to the "Great Place." The witch-doctor, clad in the varied and alarming insignia of his office, acted as leader.

John Flood was extremely proud of his achievement, and Nolai thought far more of her husband than ever before. He had done a notable deed; one which would be talked of at all the kraals in the land for years to come, and she would shine with reflected glory. She had been planning another and more

determined effort to break the galling conjugal yoke, but under this new development she determined to postpone action. Her lover, brave as he no doubt was, had never killed a python—nor could she hope he was likely ever to do so. She glanced at the gleaming coils of the dead monster, and shuddered with mingled terror and enjoyment—a complex sensation well known to the feminine bosom, no matter what be its colour. The cold, dead, lidless eyes fascinated her almost as much as they had the monkey. There is a widespread belief among natives to the effect that women often have snakes as their lovers. Nolai wondered how any woman could love such a terrific creature. All the same, she made up her mind that should she ever bear a son she would call his name "Munyu."

The party from the "Great Place" was overtaken by night before it reached the trader's. The witch-doctor, who stalked majestically in front, found it necessary to call a halt every now and then for the purpose of letting off his excitement by violent dancing, during which the bones and bladders which were festooned all over him made an appalling rattle, and by loud yellings. The party found the trader engaged in skinning the snake by the light of a fire in front of his shop, and in the presence of a large number of spectators. The witch-doctor ordered the proceedings at once to stop, and then seized hold of the python's tail. A wild wrangle ensued. The rest of the party, who rather liked the trader, stood aside whilst he and the witch-doctor engaged in a sort of tug-of-war, in the course of which—Flood

being by far the stronger man of the two—the witch-doctor was hauled ignominiously around the premises. The trader, rendered mettlesome by his exploit, absolutely refused to give the carcase up, so the witch-doctor called upon his companions, in terms of their allegiance to the chief, to assist him. A compromise was eventually arrived at. Flood only valued the skin, whereas the witch-doctor knew that the parts most valuable for magical purposes were the head and the gall. Moreover, he did not quite know if the terms of his commission included the killing of the trader in the event of a refusal on his part to give up the prey, especially as the trader was known to be more or less of a favourite with the powerful Gcaleka chief. It took until nearly midnight to settle the difficulty, and then the witch-doctor marched off in somewhat qualified triumph with the python's head in his skin wallet and the gall-bladder tied securely at the end of a small stick, which he held carefully before him at arm's length. The Bomvana chief, although he grumbled somewhat at not getting the complete carcase, was, on the whole, fairly well satisfied.

After making his report the witch-doctor at once went to work upon his magical rites, and he worked with such effect that he was able to administer the gall of the python, in its skull, to his august master next morning. The function took place, with all due solemnity, before daybreak, at the gate of the calf-pen. History does not record whether the potion acted as an emetic or not, but it may be safely assumed that the chief made an exceedingly wry face.

But this by no means closed the incident. Kreli, the Bomvana chief's suzerain, came to hear of the slaying of the serpent, and his indignation waxed great when the seizure of the skull and gall by his vassal was reported to him. The head of the Royal College of Gcaleka Witch-doctors worked upon the chief's feelings to such an extent that his indignation grew to fury. How, he asked, in a wrathful message, could his vassal dare to infringe upon the Royal prerogative in such an unheard-of manner? The message followed with a demand for immediate surrender of the skull, and ended with a threat of war in the event of non-compliance. It was, in fact, an ultimatum.

The ideas of the Bomvana chief on the subject of suzerainty were probably as different from those of Kreli as President Kruger's were from those of Mr Chamberlain, but he wisely refrained from arguing the point. In a penitent and conciliatory message he apologised for what had occurred, and expressed deep regret that, quite outside his orders on the subject, the python's skull had been burnt into powder for medicinal purposes by his witch-doctor.

A portion of the powder—all, in fact, that was left—he begged leave to send to his suzerain in the horn of a bushbuck, and he could only hope, loyally, that the same would turn out as efficacious as such medicine was generally supposed to be. This powder had, on the approach of Kreli's party becoming known, been prepared from the bones of a crow knocked over for the purpose by one of the boys at the kraal with his stick.

Kreli was by no means taken in by the bushbuck horn and its contents. His indignation at being tricked was boundless, and the only thing which prevented him from sending an army into Bomvanaland to "eat up" the chief was the fact that he was in daily expectation of a declaration of war on the part of Umtirara, chief of the Tembu tribe. But the matter was far too important to be allowed to drop, so he called a great council of the "Izibonda" (lit. "poles," such as those which support the roof of a hut) or elders, as well as the numerous petty chiefs who owned his sway and basked in the reflection of his power.

A few days afterwards the great council met at Kreli's "Great Place," the exact spot of assembly being the "inkundhla," or gate of the big cattle enclosure. One by one the grey-headed peers arrived, each with a face of extreme gravity, as suited the momentous occasion. Deliberative assemblies of this class are much enjoyed by natives, especially by those who have passed the age of exuberant physical vitality. They give opportunity for the exercise of those faculties of oratory and argument which the Kaffir possesses to such a remarkable degree.

The matter had now assumed national importance. That the paramount chief should have been tricked out of so favourable an opportunity for adding to his wisdom, his subtlety and his fierceness, particularly at the time when he was on the eve of going to war with another powerful potentate, was unfortunate and inopportune in the last degree. It was subversive to the dignity of the tribe which

proudly derived its name from the mighty Gcaleka; it was revolutionary, socialistic, or whatever the current equivalents of these terms happened to be. Why, if such a thing came to be talked of among the surrounding clans, not alone would it bring the Gcaleka nation into contempt, but Kreli would probably lose allies in his coming struggle with the Tembus. Something, clearly, must be done—but what?

The councillors deliberated for three days without coming to a decision, and it was then that the principal witch-doctor showed a way out of the condition of dead-lock. In the middle of a wild babel, in which everyone was shouting his opinion as he could, this great man arose to his feet and discarded his kaross. Then he aimed a glance of scathing contempt at the war-doctor, with whom he had been bickering considerably throughout the meeting. A hush at once fell upon the assembly as he spoke—

"O chief and councillors of the Gcaleka nation, we are all agreed that the matter of the python cannot be allowed to rest, but we have been unable to agree as to what action should be taken. Hear, then, my words, and let the chief say if they be not words of wisdom.

"I am, as you all know, not a fighting man; my wars are with the secret evil-doer, so I cannot give an opinion as to your decision to refrain from 'eating up' the Bomvana chief. But this thought comes to me: we have all heard the words of the war-doctor. Now, if those words be true, what is the ground for your hesitation? Did he not say that

after the warriors had been sprinkled with the boiling root-broth, and had sprung through the magic smoke, they would become so terrible that a hundred of the enemy would flee from one of them? But let that pass. The chief has decided in his sagacity —or, perhaps, owing to your advice—which his father, the great Hintza, urged him to follow in important matters, that he will not make the python an occasion of war at the present time.

"It is not for me, a servant, to question the decisions of my chief, or to ask how it is, in view of the promises of the war-doctor, that you hesitate from advising that the warriors be at once led to victory. But it is my duty to reveal what was told to me in a vision. Know, then, that 'Munyu,' which was slain by Folodi, the European, was a messenger sent by the 'Imishologu'[1] to convey tokens of their favour to Kreli, and that if the qualities of the serpent be wholly lost to our chief, the 'Imishologu' will turn their faces from us in the hour of danger.

"As to this"—here he produced the bushbuck horn sent by the Bomvana chief, and scornfully scattered its contents upon the ground, after which he hurled the horn away over the heads of his hearers.

"What, then, must be done?" he continued. "Why, this: If the chief cannot obtain the skull and gall of 'Munyu,' there is nothing to prevent him getting the skull and gall of 'Munyu's' slayer. The European has vanquished the snake, therefore is he greater than the snake. Bring unto me this

[1] Ancestral spirits.

man's head and gall, and I will prepare a draught for Kreli which will make him so wise and subtle that you will all be as children before him, and so fierce that the warriors of Umtirara will flee from before his face."

The witch-doctor resumed his seat amid guttural murmurs of approval, and the councillors, glad to have such an easy way indicated out of a thorny situation, adopted his proposal on the spot. Nothing now remained to be done but to organise a killing party and despatch it to the residence of the unsuspecting trader.

The witch-doctor pronounced the current state of the moon to be propitious, so messengers were at once sent to warn a sufficient number of men from the surrounding kraals for immediate duty.

It is usually and mistakenly considered that Kaffirs are absolutely deficient in gratitude. If such were the case John Flood would have come to a sudden end, most probably, since his skull was required intact, by strangling with a thong. But there happened to be present at the council a man whom the trader had once successfully treated for a serious illness after the native doctors had pronounced his case to be hopeless. In the middle of the night Flood was awakened by a tap at the door of his sleeping hut. Without opening the door he asked who it was that wanted him.

"It is I, Fanti. Open the door."

Flood at once admitted the man, who, immediately upon entering, blew out the candle which the trader held in his hand.

"Folodi," he said, in an agitated whisper, "put the saddle on your best horse, and get to the other side of the Kei River as soon as you can."

"Why—what have I done?" queried the astonished trader.

"It is the matter of the python which you killed, and of which the Bomvana chief drank the gall. Kreli is going to war, and he means to have *your* skull and to drink *your* gall out of it on the day the army is doctored. You are now a very great man because you slew 'Munyu,' and the chief wants your greatness for himself."

"But Kreli is my friend," said Flood, with a considerable tremor in his voice, "and I am not one of his own men to kill at his pleasure. I never heard of such a thing in my life—I—I"—

"Folodi," interrupted Fanti in a tone which carried conviction, "the men are now on the way to kill you, led by the witch-doctor. Go or stay as you please, but I have told you the truth, and I can wait no longer to risk having my neck twisted."

As he spoke the last words Fanti glided out of the hut, and vanished like a ghost. John Flood knew the customs of the natives better, I fear, than he knew his prayers, so he stood not upon the order of his going. He pulled down the bars of the kraal entrance so as to let the cattle go free. After this he hurriedly put on his best suit of clothes, and took down his trusty double-barrelled gun and its appurtenances from where they hung to the wattled roof. Then he saddled his best pony.

He took a last look at the goods upon his shelves.

The stock had recently been added to; it was very hard to have to abandon it.

He did not awaken Nolai, who slept in the kitchen. He knew that her father would take her home, and that the law of the land required that she should be comfortably maintained until she again married, out of the dowry cattle. He was glad there were no children to complicate matters.

After he had mounted his pony, John Flood sat for a moment and gazed with emotion upon the spot where he had spent several contented years. Just as he was about to start he bethought himself of the python's skin. He had carefully dried it, and it lay in a coil upon one of the shelves in the shop. That, at all events, he determined they should not have, so he dismounted, re-entered the hut, and fetched the trophy, which he tied with a thong to the side of his saddle. Then he turned and rode sadly, though swiftly, away.

Flood knew every inch of the country, so he had no difficulty in reaching the Colonial boundary. His first halt was made at a forest which he reached shortly before daybreak, and in which he mournfully spent the long summer's day. The only thing which consoled him in his tribulations was the thought that he had managed to remove the skin of the python out of the reach of Kreli and the witch-doctors.

In spite of the fact that he kept this skin till the day of his death, which happened at a ripe old age, John Flood, ever after his flight, disliked pythons probably as much as the monkey whose life he was unfortunate enough to be instrumental in saving.

RAINMAKING

I.

Drought had weighed heavily upon Pondoland for many weary months, and when more than half of what was usually ploughing season had passed, leaving the ground as stone to ploughshare and pick, the people began to groan at the prospect of having to do without beer ; for the millet, from which it is brewed, having no leaf-sheath to protect the grain (such as covers the maize-cob), if sown late often is ruined by an early frost. When, however, a month afterwards, the weather was still dry and hotter than ever, they realised that even the maize crop was in serious danger. Then the women followed the men about with wailings, saying that they and their children would perish. The men bent anxious eyes upon the hollow-flanked cattle that wandered about lowing with hunger and stumbling among the stones on the scorched hillsides, often falling to rise no more.

A deputation representing the Pondo chiefs, headmen and men of influence appeared before Umquikela, the paramount Chief at Qaukeni, his "Great Place," and besought him to send for Umgwadhla, the great tribal "inyanga ya'mvula," or "rain doctor," and order him to make rain. A somewhat similar step had been taken more than a month before, but without the desired result. Much

indignation was consequently felt against Umgwadhla, who was, as a matter of fact, generally blamed for the deplorable condition of the country.

Umgwadhla was looked upon as very expert in his particular line of business; he had hitherto given the greatest satisfaction. Since his appointment in succession to Kokodolo, who had been "smelt out" and killed for obvious neglect of duty just before the break-up of the last great drought, ten years previously, the spring rains had not until now failed in Pondoland. Moreover, no hut around which he had inserted the "isibonda ze'zula," or lightning pegs," had ever been damaged in the heaviest thunderstorm. As a matter of fact, Umgwadhla was looked upon as a veritable "Prince of the Power of the Air."

Umquikela was, as usual, very drunk when the deputation arrived. His councillors, however, recognising the seriousness of the extent to which popular feeling was moved, kept all traders and others likely to supply him with liquor away from his hut for twenty-four hours. Consequently the Chief was, next day, quite capable of transacting State business. He heard what his lieges had to say, approved of their suggestions, issued the necessary orders, and then returned to his cups with a clear conscience.

A message was accordingly sent to Umgwadhla notifying him that the "guba," or "rain-dance," would be held on a certain day, and that his presence at the function was required. This notification was accompanied by a very significant message to the

effect that if the function were a failure he would be held responsible. Word was circulated among the people, in terms of which they had to appear at the "Great Place" on the day in question, armed, and each bringing a contribution of "imitombo," or millet, which, after having been allowed to germinate partially under the influence of damp, has been dried and ground to fine powder. It is from this, after it has been boiled and fermented, that the liquor known as "Kaffir beer" is made.

Umgwadhla fell into the deepest dismay; mindful as he was of the fate which had, under similar circumstances, overtaken a long line of predecessors. He could not help feeling that the length of his tether had now probably been reached. A drought protracted to a certain degree invariably had caused the "smelling out" and shameful death of whatever "rain doctor" happened to be in office at the time, and, as droughts invariably do come to an end eventually, the fact of rain falling soon after the immolation of an unsuccessful practitioner had raised the irresistible presumption that each of these had, by the malicious use of magical arts, deflected the rain-clouds from their proper course.

There was no sign of the weather's breaking. The red soil, especially along the footpaths, was cracking into fissures; the fibre of the herbage was giving way and leaf and blade were turning into dust. In the minor watercourses the water began to run more freely. This is an unexplained phenomenon which invariably accompanies severe South African droughts. It is probably due to pressure

upon the underground reservoirs, caused by local shrinkage of the earth's surface.

Umgwadhla day by day turned an apprehensive eye to the westward, the quarter from which thunderstorms might be expected, but the sky remained as brass. A steady, scorching wind arose every forenoon, blew all day, and sank with the sun. So long as this continued, Umgwadhla, who was in his way genuinely weather-wise, knew there was no chance of the weather breaking. He shuddered with dread day and night. He saw by the demeanour of those he came in contact with that all held him in detestation, and he continually suffered from the foretaste of a cruel death. Through the instrumentality of a few trusted friends he sent a number of his cattle out of Pondoland, but these he knew he would have great difficulty in recovering—even in the unlikely event of his managing to make his escape.

The day appointed for the "rain-dance" drew near with terrible rapidity, and at length arrived. At early morn the "ukuqusha," or driving in of the cattle at a run from every kraal for miles around to the "Great Place," began. When all the oxen had been collected the Chief selected one from his own herd for slaughter, and every petty chief, headman, and "umninizi," or head of a kraal, selected one of those driven in by him, for the same purpose. All doomed oxen were kraaled together, and then the important ceremony of doctoring the Chief began.

Umgwadhla had arrived secretly during the

previous night, with his stock of roots, herbs, and other medicines, and from these he proceeded to concoct the "isihlambiso," or magico-medicinal wash. He broke up the roots and herbs and placed them in a large earthen pot nearly full of water. Then he got a three-pronged stick about eighteen inches in length, and placing the pronged end in the mixture he twirled the stick rapidly between his palms until the liquid frothed and seethed over the edge of the pot. Then he notified the Chief that the medicine was ready.

The Chief, accompanied by his "isicaka se 'nkosi," or "medicine boy," now stalked majestically forward. The "medicine boy," lifted the pot and carried it slowly into the large kraal, out of which the cattle had now been driven, the Chief following, naked and with stately steps. Upon reaching the centre of the kraal the Chief crouched slightly forward, and the "medicine boy" lifted the pot and poured a liberal quantity of the contents over his shoulders. The "rain-doctor" and the Chief smeared this all over the body of the latter, and rubbed it in with the palms of their hands.

After this the pot, containing what remained of the mixture, was carried back to the Chief's hut, there to be kept until the end of the ensuing feast, when the washing process would be repeated, and any balance of the liquid then remaining would be spilt in the middle of the cattle kraal.

The grand ceremonial dance, known as "ukuguba," then began. The men, with faces painted

red, danced in a row in front of the women, who sat on the ground clapping their hands rhythmically and singing a song full of monotonous repetition. This song related to feuds, fights, and the greatness and prowess of ancestral chiefs, but contained no reference to rain or to anything supernatural.

When the song and the dance were over the "rain-doctor" announced that on the fifth day following, thunderclouds would arise in the north-western sky in the afternoon, and that heavy rain would immediately follow.

Then the oxen were slaughtered and the feasting began. Under the influence of their excitement the people fully believed that the promises of the "rain-doctor" would be fulfilled. The beer flowed like water, and the meat, although rather poor in condition, was satisfying—a Native is never particular about the quality of beef. Many fights took place, many skulls were cracked—some fatally, and, taking it all round, the function was a grand success; that is, of course, if we leave out of sight the main object of the gathering, which, however, had been totally forgotten for the time being.

Four days were spent in feasting, and on the morning of the fifth the people dispersed to their homes and began at once to get ready their picks and hoes against the coming rain. But the skies were still like lurid brass, and the sun as a pitiless, consuming fire.

II

On the afternoon of the third day after the feast Umgwadhla went quietly home. He was now almost in despair. He had, under the heaviest pressure, committed himself definitely to the production of rain at a given hour on a specified day, trusting to his luck to redeem the promise. The day was now terribly close. Twice more had the sun to go down in wrath and twice to rise in fury—and then—before it sank again? He now knew, by the absence of signs of its approach, that the rain would not come on the day he had named. The evening of the fourth day came, and the sun went down a bar of rusty, red smoke, the result of inland grass-fires. Then the cool stars came out, twinkling mockery at the shuddering earth and the unhappy wizard, who felt as though the woes of the suffering land were heaped upon his head.

Umgwadhla's hut was situated close to the edge of the Umsingizi Forest. This hut was his official residence, where he dwelt in retirement when engaged in practising the mysteries of his profession. He had carried home a large lump of meat from the feast. Part of this he cooked, but he found it quite impossible to eat. He sat all night on a rock a few yards distant from the hut, watching the hollow, light-punctured shell of night winding over him with horrible rapidity. Then the dawn flushed over the sea, and he realised that the dreaded day had arrived without the slightest prospect of rain. Already, in anticipation, he felt the choking strain of the thong

by which his feet would be bound to his neck, preparatory to his being flung to drown in the nearest deep river-pool.

The sun, although only just risen, smote hotter than ever through the sultry drought haze undisturbed by a breath of wind. Umgwadhla could stand it no longer; he determined to fly for his life. This he had been thinking of doing for some days past, but he knew that such a course would mean social suicide and the loss of his wealth and influence; that he would henceforth be an alien and a wanderer over the face of an unfriendly land. It was not that life seemed to him sweet under such circumstances, but that death after the manner of a strangled puppy flung into the water by mischievous boys was too bitter to face; so he seized a spear and a club, and plunged into the depths of Umsingizi. The only food he carried was a small skin bag of boiled corn which, during the oppressive hours of the previous night, he had prepared without admitting to himself for what purpose.

The scorching day dragged on to noon, and the people began to bend anxious glances towards the north-west. The sun began to sink, but, except for thin wisps of smoke from distant grass-fires, the pitiless sky was void. The sun sank into a long, low bank of orange-coloured haze, and then hope departed from the wretched people.

Before daylight next morning the hut of Umgwadhla was surrounded by the killing party sent by Umquikela to seize and slay the wizard who had worked the ruin of his nation; but the bird had

flown. Umgwadhla was already on the Natal side of the Umtamvuna River, making his way in the direction of the Baca and Hlangweni Locations in the Umzimkulu District.

A week afterwards the rain came in exactly the manner predicted by Umgwadhla. Early in the afternoon a great crudded cloud of snowy whiteness towered high over the north-western mountains, and then, drawing other clouds in its train and on its flanks, swept over Pondoland in the teeth of a raging gale.[1] Then with lightnings and thunderings the long-sealed fountains of the sky burst open, and every kloof and donga became a roaring river. Umgwadhla was cursed with fervour and fury throughout the length and breadth of the land. He, the wicked sorcerer, had kept the clouds away by means of his evil arts; now, directly he had taken his departure, the rain-bearers, no longer bridled, had hurried down with their life-giving stores. On the first clear day another "rain-doctor" came before the Chief and claimed to have, by means of his potent incantations, counteracted the evil spells cast by Umgwadhla. This man was looked upon as the saviour of his tribe. Umquikela killed a large ox in his honour, and sent him home with gifts of value.

Umgwadhla had been only two days at Umzimkulu when the rain, which happened to be general, fell. He felt that the rain-spirits, in whose service his life had been spent, had treated him very unfairly. Why could not the rain have fallen a week sooner?

[1] In South Africa thunderstorms almost invariably advance *against* the wind.

He hated to think of the future ; the contrast between the wealthy and influential position he had hitherto enjoyed, and an obscure and poverty-stricken existence as an alien suspected of the deadliest of all crimes, among the Amabaca and Hlangweni, which now awaited him, was painful in the extreme. Soon, however, a bright idea struck him, and, being a man of considerable force and character, this he determined to carry into effect. He knew that the course he resolved upon involved large risks, but these he felt it worth while to take. As soon as ever the weather cleared he started on a return journey to Qaukeni.

Early one morning a few days later Umgwadhla, accompanied by a few influential friends, whom he had taken into his confidence, appeared before Umquikela, who happened just then to be moderately sober. The Chief was giving audience before the gate of his cattle-kraal to a number of visitors. Umgwadhla strode boldly among the people assembled, who maintained an ominous silence, and saluted his master. Before anyone had time to recover from the astonishment felt at his temerity in thus, as it were, putting his head into the lion's mouth, the "rain-doctor" spake—

"O Chief, I greet you on thus coming to claim my reward for having caused the rain to fall over the length and breadth of the vast territory that owns your sway.

"Rumour has told me that during my absence, in obedience to orders from the 'imishologu' (ancestral spirits), evil men have said that by spells did I prevent the rain from falling, and that only when I

was no longer in the land to work evil, were the clouds able to revisit Pondoland.

"Hear now the truth, O Chief, and judge:

"On the night before the day on which I declared that rain should fall, the 'imishologu' revealed to me in a vision a dreadful secret. There dwells, I was told, a powerful wizard in the land of the Ambaca, who, by means of his medicines, drives back the rain-clouds when these are called up by the spells of your servant. This is done in revenge for that your illustrious father Faku slew Ncapayi, the Great Chief of the Ambaca, in battle. Seek, said the 'imishologu,' the root of a certain plant that grows in the depths of the forest; eat of it, and then go forth without fear to the Baca country. Find there the hut of the wizard; before it stands a high milkwood-tree and bound in the branches thereof is the skull of a baboon with the dried tail of a fish in its teeth, facing the land that is ruled by 'the young locust.'[1] Remove the skull, and within a day the rivers of Umquikela will be roaring to the sea.

"Here, O Chief, is the baboon's skull." (Here Umgwadhla produced the article from under his kaross.) "Touch it not for fear of evil; ye who have not been doctored against poison; more especially touch not the fish's tail, which has been soaked in very direful medicines by the Baca Magician."

Umgwadhla was reinstated in all his honours, powers, and privileges, and his influence became very much greater than it had previously been. A

[1] The word "Umquikela" means "young locust."

song was composed in his honour by the most celebrated of the tribal bards, and sung at a great feast held at the "Great Place" to celebrate the breaking up of the drought. He lived long and amassed much wealth, and he never again failed to produce rain at the due season. His supplanter retired into obscurity, but this did not save him from an evil fate. When Umgwadhla died, in extreme old age, the supplanter was "smelt out" and put to death on suspicion of having bewitched him. The unhappy pretender was taken to the top of the Taba'nkulu Mountain and placed standing, blindfolded, on the crest of the "Wizard's Rock"—a high cliff just to the left of the footpath leading to "Flagstaff" where it crosses the top of the mountain. The executioner then struck him with a heavy club on the side of the head, and he fell among the rocks at the foot of the krantz. His bones, mingled with those of many others, may yet be seen by the curious.

Rainmaking is a profitable profession, but it takes a man of genius to carry it on successfully.

THE GRATITUDE OF A SAVAGE

The crescent moon had just sunk, but the stars shone brightly down through the limpid lens of the African night. Nomandewu sat on a flat stone, moaning and talking to herself. She was a tall, gaunt Kaffir woman of about thirty years of age. Three weeks previously, little Nolala, her only child, had accidentally met her death. Ever since, Nomandewu had been distraught with grief.

The spot where the bereaved mother sat was surrounded by a low, broken wall of sods, which formed a circle of about fifteen feet in diameter. This was all remaining of the hut in which she and her husband had lived. At his death, some two years previously, the hut, in accordance with Native custom, had been burnt to the ground.

Just after the death of her husband Nomandewu obtained employment as cook in the household of John Westbrook, a cattle-farmer whose herds grazed in one of those deep valleys which cleave the base of the Great Winterberg Mountain. Mrs Westbrook had a little daughter of the same age as Nolala, and the two children used to play together, day by day. A low rustic seat, formed of a portion of a tree-trunk sunk into the ground in an upright position, stood outside the verandah of the homestead, under a spreading oak. . . . In this little Lucy would sit, Nolala squatting before her on the

ground like a small Buddhist idol cut in ebony. Thus the children would play, for hours at a time, some game of their own invention. In it hand-claps, names of people and shrieks of laughter seemed to be the principal features.

This was the manner of Nolala's death: one morning Mrs Westbrook went into the dairy to attend to the cream. The children followed, as was usual, in expectation of getting thick milk. The cream had to be put into a large earthenware jar which was kept upon a high shelf. Mrs Westbrook was in the act of lifting the vessel from its place when a large tarantula, which sprawled on the stopper, ran down her arm. She had a special dread of these creatures, with which the house was infested. In her terror she let the jar slip through her paralysed hands, and it crashed down upon the upturned face of little Nolala, who was standing next to her. The child fell to the floor with her neck broken.

Nomandewu became frantic with grief. Taking the body in her arms she rushed into the forest. It was several days before she reappeared, and then she could not be induced to reveal how the body had been disposed of. She did not resume her service, but went to live with her brother in the location formed by the farm-servants' huts, on the other side of the valley.

Mrs Westbrook was sorely distressed at the catastrophe. She tried hard to interview the bereaved mother, but Nomandewu stalked off with a terrible expression upon her face, whenever her mistress approached.

One of the farm servants was a herd named Dumani, a nephew of Nomandewu. Dumani had once been accused of stealing a fowl from his master's hen-roost, but little Lucy established his innocence. She had happened to see one of the other servants prowling near the scene of the theft, very early in the morning. This man's hut was searched and the feathers of the stolen fowl were found concealed under the ashes of his fireplace.

Kaffirs are supposed by the superficial to be utterly devoid of gratitude. As a matter of fact they are just as grateful for good offices as are any other race, but their gratitude is seldom expressed in words, or, if expressed at all, is unintelligible to those who do not understand the Kaffir nature. Now, Dumani was so grateful to little Lucy that he would have died for her, upon due occasion, without the slightest hesitation. Being, however, a mere savage Kaffir, he displayed not the slightest manifestation of his feelings, which were, therefore, quite unsuspected by anyone.

It was this unsuspected quality of gratitude which prompted this taciturn Kaffir lad of sixteen to follow Nomandewu night after night upon her rambles, to crawl like a snake up to the low wall behind which it was her habit to sit beneath the silent stars, and to lie there for hours with ear strained to catch the least syllable of her incoherent mutterings. During these long vigils, when all the others on the farm were fast asleep, it would seem to Dumani as though he and the weird woman were the only two beings left in the wide world. Here

lay the only reality for him ; all else had dissolved into wavering shadows.

Immediately after Nolala's death, Dumani, by no process which he could have explained, divined that Lucy was in danger, and the idea grew until it absorbed his whole mind. Yet, with the secretiveness of his race he never hinted of his suspicions to a living soul. As a matter of fact, outside his own instincts he had absolutely no evidence to go upon. Nevertheless he felt no doubts ; his suspicions, vague at first, had gradually crystallised into certainty. He watched, waited, and held his peace.

The intense, silent and unsleeping scrutiny of the Kaffir lad was not unobserved by Nomandewu, who, accordingly, felt uneasy in his presence and continually endeavoured to avoid him. But although she could not help noticing that he had her under observation by day, she had no idea that he followed her at night.

Dumani, in his master's estimation had fallen from grace. Until lately he had been a model cattle-herd ; now he was often found asleep under a bush whilst his cattle trespassed among the crops or strayed away over the infinite expanse of the hills. For such misdemeanours he had been beaten several times ; his dismissal, even, had been threatened. Then he grew thin and haggard, and avoided his friends. The members of his family became uneasy and held anxious consultations over his unsatisfactory state. Eventually they came to the conclusion that he was undergoing the preliminary mental and moral disturbances incidental to the "twasa," or spiritual

change which comes over those who possess the vocation for witch-doctorship. This caused Dumani to be treated with considerable respect, as one to whom a great future was possible.

One morning Dumani noticed Nomandewu stealing away to the forest with an axe in her hand. After driving his cattle to their usual pasture he followed. The forest filled the upper section of the valley, which was bounded by a sheer wall of perpendicular cliff, shaped like a horse-shoe, over which a stream foamed down. The lad stole softly up the watercourse, pausing every now and then to listen. At length his keen ear caught a rhythmic beat of distant chopping, and he crept carefully in the direction of the source of the sound. Steadily and regularly, without pause or intermission, the strokes went on.

He came within sight of the chopper. It was Nomandewu. Stripped to the waist, to give her arms free play, the woman relentlessly plied her task. As she swung the heavy axe with her thin, sinewy arms, the sweat poured from her in streams. She was engaged in felling a young ironwood tree, the stem of which was about fifteen inches in diameter.

Dumani, concealed in a patch of bracken, lay and watched her at his ease. As she stood her back was towards him, but in the delivery of each stroke she made a half-turn from the axis of her hips, and he was thus enabled to catch glimpses of her face. It was dull and haggard ; her sunken eyes had the cold glitter one sees in the glance of an angry snake.

The wood was intensely hard, but the woman had been some considerable time at her task, so before

very long the tree fell crashing to the ground. Then for a few seconds she stood panting and regarded the result of her work. After this she secreted the axe, picked up her blanket, and went off in the direction of her home. She passed so close to Dumani that he might have touched her by stretching forth his hand. As soon as he had lost the sound of her footsteps Dumani hastened away to collect his scattered cattle.

Next morning Nomandewu again returned to the forest, and once more the Kaffir lad followed her. As he drew near the spot where the tree had been felled the sound of the steady, rhythmic falling of the axe smote anew upon his ear. Stealing into his hiding-place of the previous day, Dumani resumed his observations. He found that the branches had all been chopped off just above where they spread out from the top of the clean bole, and that the bole itself was being cut through about three feet below the axis from which the branches spread. After she had severed the trunk Nomandewu lifted the upper portion into a perpendicular position, propped it to prevent it falling, and regarded it intently. Dumani was at once struck by the resemblance it bore to the rustic seat at the homestead. Mindful of a thrashing he had received on the previous day, on account of his cattle having strayed, he hurried away, leaving Nomandewu absorbed in the contemplation of her handiwork.

A few days subsequently Nomandewu surprised everybody by appearing at the homestead and asking to be re-employed. Mrs Westbrook, much relieved,

reinstated her at once as cook. Nomandewu had always been taciturn: now she developed an unsuspected vein of friendliness. She had always been an excellent servant: now she performed her duties with increased skill and diligence. Her mistress, although still bitterly grieved at what had taken place, congratulated herself upon the unfortunate incident being, as she imagined, finally closed. She treated Nomandewu with great consideration and, this among other tokens of favour, presented her with a black dress. Nomandewu, who had lived at a Mission Station, understood the significance of this gift and appeared to be appropriately grateful.

Dumani continually puzzled his brain over the scenes he had witnessed in the forest, and still kept up his scrutiny. He knew that Nomandewu had not again gone to the spot where she had felled the tree, so for some time he did not think it worth his while to revisit it either. She seemed to be uneasy in his presence. Often when he appeared in the kitchen she would drive him forth with scoldings; on other occasions she would treat him with friendliness and share with him choice portions of her food. But Dumani's alert instincts detected a certain spuriousness in these demonstrations.

About ten days after Nomandewu returned to her service, Dumani, impelled by the cravings of his absorbing curiosity, went again to the scene of his espionage in the forest. He found, to his further mystification, that the portion of the tree which resembled a rustic seat had been removed. After diligent search he managed to discover a trail leading

up towards the horse-shoe cliff, which was nearly half a mile away from the spot. Weighted by the heavy log the woman's footsteps had here and there sunk deeply into the soil. He followed the trail until he reached a moraine which was piled against the base of the precipice. In the interstices of this stunted trees grew, and just where it touched the cliff the latter was pierced by a small cavern. Dumani, no longer attempting to trace the footsteps, climbed over the rugged jumble of rocks and made straight for the cavern. In it he found the missing log. A hole had been sunk in the clay floor, and in this the shaft had been firmly fixed. A rustic seat, bearing a most remarkable resemblance to the one at the homestead, had thus been formed.

After one glance over the interior of the cave, Dumani hurried away. The significance of his discovery flashed upon him : the chair could only be meant for Lucy ; to this lonely spot the weird woman meant to bring her, and, as Dumani was firmly convinced, to bring her alive. This, then, was to be the scene of Nomandewu's revenge ; to this dark corner of the silent forest was little Lucy to be brought, here to expiate in some dreadful fashion the mischance of her playmate's death.

The discovery came as a great relief to the overwrought mind of the Kaffir lad. He now had something definite to go upon ; it was no longer a case of mere blind groping for hidden motives. The issue was clear : he and Nomandewu had to grip together in a life-and-death struggle, Lucy's preservation being the reward of his victory, her destruction the penalty

of his defeat. Nevertheless, in his unaccountable, savage way, Dumani kept his own counsel—never bethinking him that a word he could so easily speak would remove the terrible danger hanging over the head—to save a single hair of which he would unhesitatingly have died.

Everyone outside the sphere of his strategy became unreal to the absorbed mind of the Kaffir lad, whose faculties, in his intense abstraction, became preternaturally keen. He felt that up to a certain point he could interpret the workings of Nomandewu's mind as clearly as though she spake aloud her every thought in his hearing. He now knew, with absolute certainty, that she was only waiting for the first favourable opportunity to carry out her design, whatever it might be, against little Lucy, and that such an opportunity could only be occasioned by his absence.

The opportunity soon came. One evening Dumani received an order to start next morning, with some cattle which had been sold, for a farm situated a long day's journey away. He left before daylight ; at breakfast-time both Lucy and Nomandewu were found to be missing.

Early rising was the habit of all at the farm. Lucy had last been seen, shortly after sunrise, in the orchard. This extended from near the house to within a few yards of the narrow strip of bush fringing the stream at the bottom of the valley, and which wound continuously with the course of the stream and connected the various patches of forest with which the valley was so richly furnished.

No rain had fallen for some time past, so at first

no spoor could be found. Every soul on the farm turned out and joined in the search. In the course of the day help came from the surrounding farms. Old Gezwindt, a Hottentot celebrated all over the countryside for his skill as a spoor-tracker, was sent for. It was not long before he discovered a fresh barefoot trail leading *down* the stream, and consequently in a direction opposite to that of the forest at the foot of the horse-shoe cliff. The trail led straight towards another forest, known to be very rough and impenetrable, which lay about two miles from the homestead. The footprints ceased at a ridge of rocks about half a mile from where the first trace had been found. Nevertheless, the indication was sufficient to turn the attention of the searchers wholly to the lower forest.

The day wore on without any fresh discovery being made. By nightfall every nook and corner of the lower forest had been explored, and then the searchers sadly withdrew to wait for the light of another day. The parents of the lost child were almost frantic with anxiety and grief.

. . . . . .

Dumani lost no time on his journey. The day was cool, so he was able to drive the cattle swiftly. He arrived at his destination just before sundown, delivered the cattle, and, without resting at all, started on his return journey. His course lay across a broken, undulating country. Downhill he used the long, swinging trot by means of which the Kaffir can cover distances which fill the European with astonishment; uphill he slowly crept, husbanding his failing strength.

The feeling of expectant dread which filled Dumani's mind buoyed him up and spurred his lagging paces. He had most unwillingly obeyed his master's orders to leave the farm, and thus give Nomandewu the opportunity he knew she was waiting for. The night was moonless, but the Kaffir boy could have found his course blindfold. The whispering trees seemed full of messages calling him to hurry on and help. Without stopping, he munched from time to time a handful of the boiled maize which he carried in his skin bag. He rested for a few seconds at each of the many streams he crossed, and took a deep draught of water.

The short summer night was just about to merge into dawn when Dumani, weary almost unto death, reached the top of the last ridge. From here the homestead was visible; lights shone from the windows; when he drew nearer he could see the doors standing open and a number of people grouped outside, anxiously scanning the east. Dumani dropped in his tracks behind a stone and crouched, thinking, for a few seconds. He required no further corroboration of his fears; he knew that the thing he had so long dreaded and expected had happened.

Under the influence of that exaltation which is sometimes the result of severe mental strain, the mind of man is capable of strange feats. Dumani's tense savage soul divined the catastrophe in a flash; his faculties rushed to the correct conclusion as inevitably as steel-filings rush to a magnet brought close to them. The cave—to get there as soon as

possible—to find Lucy there, alive or dead. Divesting himself of every vestige of clothing, Dumani the savage grasped his stick and crawled along the ground, as though he were a criminal escaping from the scene of his crime, until he was out of sight of the house. Then he sprang up, ran to the edge of the forest, and plunged in among the trees.

Every trace of his fatigue had vanished, but the thicket was dense and thorny, so his progress was slow and painful. Dawn was shimmering in the east, but night still lurked unsmitten beneath the boskage. More than once he fell headlong, tripped up by the treacherous "monkey-ropes" of which the forest was full. The cruel thorns scarred him until he was covered with blood.

As daylight grew his progress became somewhat easier; now he could avoid bruising himself against the tree-trunks and the lichen-covered rocks. Soon the woods became vocal with the morning songs of the birds; the guttural calls of the questing monkeys seemed to sound from every tree-top. At length he struck the footpath he had been seeking, and which wound up the slope towards the horse-shoe cliff. Then he reached the tumbled pile of boulders bounding the moraine; his goal was now close at hand.

A great dread clutched at his throbbing heart—what sight of horror might not the cavern contain? For a minute he surrendered himself to an apprehension of the direst contingency, and a wild throb of almost delight thrilled him as he anticipated the vengeance he would wreak upon the murderer; he

would track her through the world until his hungry hands could tear her limb from limb.

As he ascended the moraine the trees grew sparser and sparser, until at length he caught a glimpse of the crest of the cliff, rosy in the first sunbeam. The glow filled his heart with hope and he hurried forward with renewed strength.

He stopped short and dropped into concealment behind a boulder. There, among the trees, immediately before the cave, stood the erect, rigid figure of Nomandewu—the head bent forward and the open hands pendent. But how still she was ; she did not seem even to breathe. Dumani stared ; he felt no fear, yet he recognised that it would be only a measure of common prudence to wait until he had recovered his wind before advancing to the attack. A rustle of leaves whispered around him ; the upper boughs of the trees began gently to sway ; the figure turned slowly until it faced him. Then Dumani sprang to his feet and rushed forward, for he saw that Nomandewu was dead. She was hanging from a bough by a rope made out of the shreds of a torn blanket.

Dumani climbed to the mouth of the cave. As he surmounted the level of the floor he closed his eyes and bent his head for an instant, dreading that which he might next see. Then he lifted his head and looked. Little Lucy, fast asleep and apparently quite unhurt, was before him, tied securely within the spreading arms of the white-ironwood log.

Dumani lay upon the ground for a space, his pulses faint from reaction, his breath coming in

husky sobs. He arose, climbed out of the cave, untied the swaying horror from the tree and flung it out of sight into a deep cleft. Then he returned and released the child. She was dazed with fright, but she soon recovered and clung, sobbing, to her rescuer. Just in front of the log was a small mound of earth. This, it was afterwards found, was the grave of Nolala.

Dumani carried Lucy homewards through the forest and restored her to her distracted parents. Soon a gun-shot—the signal that the child had been found—rang through the valley, and the searchers hurried back to the homestead.

Dumani, after an enormous meal of meat, lay down in his hut and slept for nearly forty-eight hours. Then he quietly resumed his herding of cattle. He still kept his own counsel; in fact it was not until after his marriage, several years subsequently, that he revealed how he came to save little Lucy from a horrible death. He married an extremely well-favoured damsel who dwelt at the location upon the adjoining farm, and his master contributed liberally towards the dowry. His wife drew the story from him bit by bit. She was too proud of her husband's achievement to keep it to herself.

MR BLOXAM'S CHOICE

I.

"The best-laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley."

One summer evening in the early fifties, three wagons, each drawn by a team of twelve oxen, might have been seen descending the Zuurberg Pass, on the road leading from Grahamstown to Port Elizabeth. The heavy thumping of the lumbering, springless vehicles and the wild yellings of the uncouth names of the individual members of the teams—without which no self-respecting wagon-driver feels that he does his duty to his responsible post — no doubt scared the bushbucks and the monkeys for miles along the bush-covered range.

Each turn-out had a festive appearance; the vehicles were newly-painted, the "tents" were of the whitest canvas, and a stick, surmounted by the tail of an ox, was fixed vertically to each front yoke. Even the Hottentot drivers and leaders showed signs of the prevailing smartness, for their clothes had evidently been recently washed and their hats and veldschoens were new.

The wagons were nearly empty. In fact, with the exception of one, each contained nothing but a provision chest, a portmanteau and some bedding. The exception contained, in addition, two gentlemen in their shirt-sleeves. Walking dejectedly some few yards behind it, was another gentleman,

similarly denuded. It could be seen at a glance that all were ministers of the Gospel.

The pedestrian was the youngest of the three. He was a man of about thirty, with a somewhat tall and slight, but well-knit figure. His dark, handsome, clean-shaven face wore an expression of mingled sadness, apprehension and discontent. Of the two in the wagon the elder was apparently over forty-five. His smooth, red face had a jovial expression. The expanse of his forehead carried more than a suggestion of approaching baldness. With a figure short and rotund, his whole appearance was suggestive of the flesh-pots of Egypt.

His companion, who looked five or six years younger, was a spare-built man of middle height. He had thin lips, light-brown hair, steel-blue eyes and a reticent expression. He sat upright and gravely regarded the stout gentleman, who, comfortably propped by pillows, gave vent to the highest spirits and enlivened the situation by a succession of frivolous remarks and occasional snatches of song.

These clerics belonged to a religious body which has done much useful work among both Europeans and natives in South Africa. Severally bachelors, they were now on their way to Algoa Bay with the intention of forthwith entering into the bonds of holy matrimony—for the ship bearing the three ladies who had agreed to share their respective hearths and homes had, after a prosperous voyage, reached port.

It will, of course, be understood that the parties

to these alliances were absolute strangers one to another. Half a century ago the daughters of the land suitable as helpmeets to men in the position of ministers were scarce, and it was not uncommon for several ministers to request their particular Mission Society to select and send out to them suitable partners. All the parties had to sign an undertaking to the effect that they, individually, would conform to certain regulations governing the apportionment. Judged from a purely sentimental standpoint, the system may have had its disadvantages; there is, however, reason to believe that the results were, as a rule, satisfactory. It was not so popular with the younger as with the older men. It may well be imagined that the former would have preferred doing their own love-making to having it done for them by the Mission Board; but the principal reason was that upon the arrival of each batch of brides seniority carried the privilege of first selection, and thus the youngest and prettiest girls were apt to fall to the older men, and the younger a man was the more danger there was of his being obliged to wed some elderly lady of comparatively unprepossessing appearance. This was the reason of the perturbation noticeable in the rather handsome face of the Reverend Mark Wardley, the young man walking behind the waggon. He knew that, being junior of the three, he would have last choice—or rather no choice at all, for he would have to content himself with the lady deemed least attractive by his companions. There was, however, a special reason in this particular instance why the youngest

of the three postulants at Hymen's shrine should feel the disadvantages of his position.

Similar conditions, no doubt, accounted for the exceedingly complacent and even radiant look which the rubicund countenance of the Reverend Peter Bloxam wore. He knew that as the eldest of the party he would have first pick, and he revelled in anticipation accordingly. Both he and Mr Wardley had been confidently informed, through letters received by the previous mail, that one of the three ladies selected was a girl of extremely well-favoured appearance; and the friends who wrote on the subject gave to each respectively a very warm inventory of her charms. Little was known of her antecedents, but this did not matter; the responsible position of a minister's wife was the mould in which her character would be formed — if it required formation—and each was quite prepared to take whatever risks there were in the matter. She was the orphan daughter of a minister who had died in India, and she had been reared and educated at the expense and under the supervision of the Mission Society.

Mr Bloxam smiled to himself as he thought of how he had cheated old Time, and chuckled with the liveliest satisfaction over the fact that he was no longer a young man. He was, as a matter of fact, very much in love with the girl he had never seen, or rather with the ideal he had formed from the written description. Exactly the same might be said of Mr Wardley.

The third postulant, the Reverend Samuel

Winterton, appeared to take things very coolly. If he derived satisfaction from the fact that the right of second selection from the little flock of ewe lambs was his, such was more sober than enthusiastic. Ardour, except for the Kingdom of Heaven, had been left entirely out of his composition, and he was very much wrapped up in a somewhat narrow religion.

Mr Bloxam and Mr Wardley laboured at reclaiming the heathen, and dwelt at country mission stations; Mr Winterton had spiritual charge of a mixed congregation, and dwelt in a small country village in Lower Albany, which, as everybody ought to know, is inhabited by the descendants of the British settlers of 1820.

It was sundown when the drivers called a halt at a grassy glade on the bank of a clear stream which was fringed with mimosa and acacia trees. Here the teams were "out-spanned" and turned out to graze. Soon a fire was lit, mutton chops were grilled, tea was brewed, and the three lovers made a frugal repast. The only talkative one of the party was Mr Bloxam, whose tongue continually tingled with ponderous jocoseness that had a strongly Scriptural flavour. He rallied Mr Wardley on his subdued manner and his bad appetite. Mr Winterton came in for a share in the chaff as well, but the shafts seemed to fall dead from the armour of his imperturbability. Mr Wardley, on the other hand, distinctly winced at every thrust, so there was far more fun to be got out of him.

"Come, Brother Wardley," said Mr Bloxam;

"a contented mind is, I know, a continual feast, but it does not do to travel on—that is, by itself. It will never do for you to arrive looking hungry. You must try and look your best, man. Eh, Winterton?"

Mr Winterton's mouth was too full to admit of his answering. Mr Wardley smiled uneasily, and helped himself to a chop, which he bravely attempted to eat.

"Just think of these three Roses of Sharon blooming for us, and soon to be transplanted to our homes," said Mr Bloxam, unctuously. "Wardley is, I am afraid, thinking of the thorns already. If, however, he had studied the botany of Scripture he would have known that Roses of Sharon have no thorns."

"I trust their ages may be suitable to ours," said Mr Wardley in a nervous voice. "It is so important in marriage that husband and wife be not too different in this respect."

"Scripture does not bear you out, brother," said Mr Bloxam in a positive tone. "Take the case of Ruth and Boaz, for instance; and we must not forget King David's having taken Abishag the Shunamite to comfort him in his old age."

"You could hardly call Abishag the wife of David," interjected Mr Winterton, whose knowledge of Scripture was precise.

"Quite so, quite so," said Mr Bloxam, airily, "yet she comforted him in his old age. The principal functions of the wife of a minister of the Gospel lie in assisting her husband in his duties and comforting him when the powers of evil seem temporarily

to prevail against his efforts. Now, a young woman, if she have the necessary dispositions, may be able to perform such duties effectively at the side of a man even considerably her senior."

"But," said Mr Wardley, with a touch of heat, "a young man also requires a helpmeet and a comforter, and surely one who"—

"Quite so, quite so; and you will get one, my brother. The hand of Providence directs us in these things, and we must pray for its guidance at this important juncture of our lives. As the eldest and most experienced I shall have the responsibility of making first selection. Although I continually pray for guidance, I feel the responsibility a great burthen."

"If it weighs so heavily, why not let it rest on the shoulders of a younger man?" said Mr Winterton, who possessed a hitherto unsuspected sense of humour. "I have no doubt Wardley will feel equal to sustaining it."

"I a—fear that would hardly do," replied Mr Bloxam, as Mr Wardley looked up with a rather sickly smile. "You see, this practice of throwing the responsibility of first choice upon the senior is, no doubt, ordained for some wise purpose."

"In the sixth chapter of the First Book of Chronicles," said Mr Winterton, with a steely twinkle in his eye, "we read how certain cities were apportioned to the priests and Levites by lot. Now, it struck me that in a case of this kind, where the guidance of"—

"Brother Winterton," said Mr Bloxam, severely,

"when a practice such as this has, so to speak, been 'made an ordinance in Israel,' no minister should dare to think himself justified in departing from it. I shall certainly follow the course laid down by wiser men than myself. In making the choice I shall be guided by the light which I have prayed may be vouchsafed to me, and if by means of that light I see unmistakable signs of a—that is, if I, as it were, see the finger of Providence pointing out any particular lady as the one most suitable as a partner, I shall not allow such a trivial consideration as mere youth on her part to deter me from following the path of duty."

At this Mr Wardley set down on the ground his plate with the hardly-tasted chop and gazed into indefinite distance with an extremely doleful expression. Mr Winterton went on eating his supper with a countenance of inscrutable gravity.

Soon after supper the two elder men laid themselves down to sleep—Mr Bloxam to dream of the black eyes, the rosy lips, and the girlish graces which, he fondly hoped, were going to turn the near-approaching winter of his years into a halcyon spring. Mr Winterton was neither delighted nor disturbed by dreams. He had a good conscience, an excellent digestion, and Nature had not blessed or cursed him with an imagination. Mr Wardley climbed the steep side of the hill at the base of which the wagons were outspanned, for a short distance, and then sat down on a stone and gazed at the thrilling sky, from which the veil of haze was now withdrawn. His heart was heavy with foreboding, and the same eyes, lips, and youthful, feminine graces which gilded the visions

of Mr Bloxam brought him the pains of Tantalus. He sat thus until the mocking, sentimental promise of the unarisen moon filled all the west, and then he fled back to the wagons to try and escape from the burthen of his thoughts.

At next morning's dawn the sleepers were aroused, and the oxen stepped forward with the unladen wagons lightly as though treading the flowery path of Love.

II

Five days previous to the opening of this story the Reverend Josiah Wiseman, with Louisa, his wife, stepped down from the parsonage on "The Hill," to the jetty at Port Elizabeth, immediately after the good ship *Silver Lining*, of Leith, cast anchor in the roadstead, and engaged the services of a boatman to convey them to the vessel. The day was fine and the sea was smooth, or else Mrs Wiseman would never have trusted herself even on this, the fringe of the great waters. She was one of those motherly parties who never become old in heart or feeling, and consequently never cease to take an interest in the love-affairs of their acquaintances. Neither the forty-eight years of her life nor her massive bulk had tamed her sprightliness or dimmed her merry eye. She had looked more or less the same for the past twenty years; even her increase of size had been so gradual that, however striking her portly presence may have been to strangers, her husband and her intimate acquaintances did not notice it as being

anything remarkable. She had come gently down the hill of Time like a snowball rolling down a gradual slope and continually gathering accretions without altering much in general appearance. Her only child, a girl, had died in its infancy many years previously, and the unexpended motherhood of her nature seemed to expand and envelop every girl in love, or about to marry, in its sympathetic folds. She had come out in her youth under circumstances similar to those of the three ladies sent out as brides for the ministers whose acquaintance we have made, and who were passengers by the *Silver Lining*. These damsels were to be her guests until their marriage, and she was now on her way to welcome them.

As the boat drew near the vessel's side, the bright, pretty face of a young girl, who was gazing intently at the shore, might have been seen above the rail. She had very large, dark eyes, brown wavy hair, rosy cheeks, and a mouth like a rosebud in a hurry to blossom. Add to the foregoing a stature rather below the middle height, a neatly turned figure and remarkably pretty feet and hands, and you have a fairly recognisable portrait of Miss Stella Mason, the delineation of whose charms had already impressed the middle-aged but inflammable heart of the Reverend Peter Bloxam and filled the sentimental bosom of the Reverend Mark Wardley with hopeless woe.

Sitting together under an awning aft of the companion hatch were two austere-looking damsels of uncertain age, who, in spite of considerable diversity

of appearance, might have been taken for sisters, so much did they resemble each other in dress, deportment and expression. Each had a book of a highly moral tone lying open upon her discreet lap, and was reading therein in ostentatious disregard of what minds less absorbed by the higher spheres of morality would have considered the interesting prospect afforded by this, the first glimpse of the land which was to be their future home. They had, as a matter of fact, already taken a good look at the shore from their cabin windows; but now the abiding abstract principles that governed their circumspect lives again claimed their attention to the exclusion of unimportant detail.

They both wore dresses of brown linsey, buttoned very high at the throat, and black straw hats innocent of all but the very simplest of trimming. Their white, rather bony hands were skirted by immaculate cuffs. The elder of the two, Miss Lavinia Simpson, had light-brown hair, brushed smoothly back from a high forehead, and her longish upper lip protruded over a somewhat receding chin. Her face was pale and narrow, and she wore spectacles over eyes of an indeterminate hue. Her companion, Miss Matilda Whitmore, had hair of a darker shade of brown, and wide, light-blue eyes. Her face was broad and her cheek-bones rather high. The thin lips of her pursed mouth strongly suggested a potatoes, prunes, and prism training. These ladies seemed to exhale an atmosphere of uncompromising and aggressive virtue.

Mr Wiseman ascended the companion ladder and

introduced himself. Mrs Wiseman's courage failed her at the prospect of an ascent, so she remained in the boat, where the three strangers were duly presented to her, after being handed over by the captain's wife. The boat then returned to the shore, and the party climbed the hill to the hospitable threshold of the Parsonage.

It soon became apparent that Miss Mason had been, so to say, sent to Coventry by the other two, for they kept a marked physical and moral distance from her. Mrs Wiseman from the first felt drawn towards the young girl, and the friendly expression of this impulse was at once resented by the others, who stiffened up and formed themselves into a defensive alliance, which suggested possibilities of becoming offensive as well.

The fair Stella, however, did not appear to be chilled in the slightest degree by the cold shoulders turned towards her by her companions on the road to Hymen's shrine, for she chatted in the friendliest manner with Mr and Mrs Wiseman, made herself quite at home at the Parsonage, and appeared to turn up her pretty little nose at the proper airs of the others. These, as a matter of fact, had been highly scandalised at what they considered a flirtation between her and the second mate of the *Silver Lining*, and even gone the length of remonstrating with her on the subject of her frivolity. The second mate was a muscular young Scotsman named Donald Ramsay; with him Stella had struck up a perfectly innocent friendship, but the severe virtue of Lavinia and Matilda had received such shocks

from what they imagined to be the real state of affairs, that it became like erected porcupine quills whenever she approached. Mrs Wiseman soon saw what the true drift of things was, so she lodged the two elder ladies in one room and put Stella by herself in another.

The post for Grahamstown was timed to leave next morning, so Mr Wiseman retired to his study and wrote to the three expectant ones, informing them of the arrival of the *Silver Lining* with her precious freight, after a prosperous voyage.

. . . . . .

After the ladies had retired to their respective chambers kind Mrs Wiseman wrapped herself in a loose dressing-gown of heroic proportions, and wandered forth in search of gossip. She first tapped lightly at the door of the room occupied by Lavinia and Matilda. She heard a whispered colloquy going on inside, but there was no response to her knock. Then she turned the handle, with the idea of opening the door and thus saving her guests the trouble of getting up, in case they were already in bed. She found, however, that the key had been turned in the lock, so she stole thankfully away to Stella's room. A faint "Come in," uttered in a voice that strongly suggested tears, reached her through the panel, and she entered, to find the girl, whose previous manner had been as that of one without a single care, flung on the bed, with her face buried in the pillow, and sobbing as though her heart were breaking. The motherly sympathy of the women went out to the desolate girl, and she folded her to a

breast where loving kindness and bulk were in proportions of like vastness.

The girl told all her troubles and fears. Her story was a sad one. An orphan, and educated at the expense of the Mission Society, she had chosen the alternative of coming to South Africa and marrying a man she had never seen or heard of in preference to undertaking teaching work, which she not alone hated, but was quite unfit for. She had suddenly made up her mind to this course, to supply the place of one of the Lavinia-Matilda sisterhood, who was to have come, but who was prevented from doing so by illness. Alone with her thoughts, amid the silence of the sea, Stella had come bitterly to regret the step she had unthinkingly taken. Lavinia and Matilda had disliked her from the first, and excluded her from their improving companionship. When she made friends with the young Scotsman, who made her his confidante in respect of an ardent mutual attachment between himself and a girl he had left behind him, they had made cruel remarks on the subject, which had the effect of making her practically drop their acquaintance. Kind Mrs Wiseman did her best to comfort this belated little sunbird, who had absorbed some of the sombreness of the plumage of the too-highly domesticated fowls whose cage she had shared during the past three months, and then retired to her room, where she woke her husband up for the purpose of making him listen to Stella's history.

Next morning she heard Lavinia—in a voice evidently meant to be overheard—congratulating

Matilda upon the fact that they had locked their door before retiring to rest, and thus prevented the entrance of an intruder. "One can never feel quite safe, you know, in savage countries."

As the week which had to elapse between the arrival of the nymphs and that of the swains drew to a close, Mrs Wiseman found herself more and more drawn towards Stella, but unable to approach nearer to anything like friendliness with the other two. Her relations with Stella no doubt formed a bar to anything of the kind. Consequently, these patterns of propriety of the very properest type continued to cultivate each other's society to a point of exclusiveness that verged upon rudeness.

As her regard for Stella grew, Mrs Wiseman began to think more and more of the girl's future. She was well acquainted with the three ministers, and having had experience of the working of the system under which these marriages were arranged, she had no difficulty in forecasting Stella's connubial destiny. She was absolutely certain that the Reverend Peter Bloxam would see the finger of Providence clearly indicating Stella as his fore-ordained bride, and she sighed at the incongruous prospect. As to young Wardley, well, he and Stella would have suited each other excellently well; but she knew by experience that one might as well expect children to pass by a rosy-cheeked apple for the sake of a turnip as to think that the two seniors would prefer the unimpeachable but mature qualities of either Lavinia or Matilda to the beauty and sweetness of Stella. Mrs Wiseman herself had come out from England as a

pretty, fresh young girl, and had been promptly and unhesitatingly recognised as his Providence-selected bride by a man who was almost old enough to be her father. On the same occasion a certain young minister (the youngest of the batch) and she had looked at each other with eyes full of mournful sympathy that was closely akin to love—she from the side of her old, grizzled bridegroom, and he from that of his antique bride, who had fallen to him as the youngest of the party by a process of elimination of the others by his seniors, under Providential direction. In her case, however, things had, in a measure come right; her husband and the other clergyman's wife had, after four years, died within a few months of each other, and when, about a year subsequently, the widow and the widower met, they found that the mournful element in their looks had given place to one of hopeful anticipation, which was duly realised a few months afterwards in a happy marriage. The odds were, of course, very much against such a fortunate combination happening in the case of Stella and young Wardley. She sighed more and more as the time for the arrival of the three suitors drew nigh, and the gloom of her thoughts seemed to communicate itself to all the others, so much so that the Parsonage took on the air of a house from which funerals rather than weddings were expected.

It was the evening before the expected arrival of the bridegrooms. The brides had retired to their rooms, and Mrs Wiseman went upstairs to have her usual chat with Stella. They had hitherto by tacit

consent avoided discussion of the approaching events except in the most general terms.

"My dear," said Mrs Wiseman, after a pause in the conversation, "suppose you and I have a chat about those who are expected to arrive to-morrow; I know them all, so can tell you what each one is like. Do you realise that in two days you will be engaged, and that in three you will be married?"

"Yes," replied Stella; "I am not likely to forget it. I shall be glad to hear what my future husband is like."

"Well, if I must tell the truth, I think it is a great shame the way they manage these things—I mean their giving the oldest man first choice."

"Are a—any of them *very* old?"

"Well, there is Mr Bloxam; he is the eldest. To speak quite candidly, he must be at least forty-six. My dear, it's a shame of me to talk like this, for you cannot help yourself, and I *know* you'll have to marry him, and I think it's a great shame. If it had been young Wardley, now"—

"A—is Mr Wardley young?"

"Yes. My dear, you and Wardley would suit each other just beautifully. He is not so very young either; he must be nearly thirty, but I have known him ever since he first came out—quite a boy. He has a temper, but his wife could manage him perfectly if she weren't a fool or old enough to be his mother."

"I wonder," said Stella, after a reflective pause, "why Mr Wardley—you say he is good-looking?"

"He's *handsome*, my dear."

"I wonder why he didn't try and like some girl

out here, instead of letting them pick one out for him at home; especially as he has last choice, or rather has to take the one neither of the others want."

"All pique, my dear. Young Wardley *did* like a girl, a nasty little cat, who flirted with him and threw him over, and has been sorry enough for it ever since. Just after they quarrelled he met old Bloxam and Winterton, who could not get out wives until a third minister wanted one. They persuaded him to put his name to a paper asking to have one sent out to him as well, and he foolishly did so without considering. I *know* he has regretted it ever since. I told him he was a fool just after he had done it."

"Does he a—care for the other girl still?"

"Not he; he never really cared for her a bit. Dear me! when I think of his being tied to one of those stiff, proper old tabbies I feel quite wretched. I know who it will be; just see if it isn't Lavinia, with the lip and the spectacles. Winterton is by no means a fool, and you may be sure he will leave *her* alone. I don't say there's much choice between them, because, my dear, leaving you to one side, this is just the commonest lot they have ever sent out; but I'm sure no man would marry that old thing unless he had to. Now, Matilda—what's her name? Whitmore, eh?—she'd not be so bad if you could fatten her up and shake her a bit, and get her right away from that Lavinia, whom I simply can't bear."

"How will they—when will they tell us—I mean, how will it all be arranged?"

"Oh, quite simply; there won't be much beating about the bush, I can assure you. You and

Lavinia and Matilda will all sit in the drawing-room, and the three will be brought in and introduced to you. Then you will be left to look at each other like a lot of stuffed parrots; none of you—not even old Bloxam—will be able to talk a bit. Then to-morrow night an extra long prayer will be given that Providence may guide you all to choose wisely. Stuff and nonsense! as I've often told Joe. As if Providence would always give the youngest and prettiest wives to the old men and the old and ugly ones to young fellows like Wardley!"

"What is Mr Bloxam like? I suppose I ought to know, as it appears I am going to marry him," said Stella, losing the drift of her previous question.

"Fat, fussy, and over forty-five, my dear; that is what I should call him. He doesn't pray for quite as long as Winterton, but he eats a lot, and I'm sure he'd be fussy in the house. But I don't want you to hate me by-and-by in case you should happen to get fond of him, which isn't likely; so I shan't tell you another word. You'll see him quite soon enough, in all conscience."

Mrs Wiseman bade the girl an affectionate "Good-night," and then retired to her room. She found, however, that she could not sleep; she was weighted by the burthen of painful anticipation. She had long been fond of Mr Wardley in a motherly way, and during the past week she had learned to love Stella. She seemed to live once more through her bitter experience of long ago, and a like blight had now to fall upon these two in the morning of their life. She felt certain that the hearts of Stella

and Wardley would rush to each other, impelled by strong forces of both attraction and repulsion, and be damaged in the collision.

When she retired for the night her husband was fast asleep, and as he was a very heavy sleeper she had no fear of disturbing him. The sight of him serenely slumbering irritated her so that she longed to shake him. She blew out the candle, but visions of the sanguine face and the stout figure of Mr Bloxam—the former wearing an expression of smug satisfaction and proprietorship ; and the frightened, half-desperate, and wholly disgusted look of Stella, as she submitted to the caresses of her elderly lover, haunted her with a persistence that became agonising ; so she lit the candle once more. Then another aspect of the case flashed balefully across her mind, and she sat up in bed, clasping her hands convulsively to her face. What had she not been doing, wicked woman that she was? Had she not taken the very course calculated to make the burthen of the poor girl unbearable? Had she not set the girl's wandering thoughts flowing in the very direction which should have been avoided—namely, those of dislike to Mr Bloxam and love for Mr Wardley; and would not the torrents of emotion to which she would be the prey during the next two days cut channels so deep that the stream of her life would never again flow out of them? What could she now do to repair the mischief wrought by her thoughtlessness? She sat for a long time with her hands pressed to her face and the hot tears streaming through her trembling fingers. What could she do—what—what? She

got up from her bed and began pacing the room with quick, nervous steps. Her tears had now ceased, and her brow was contracted in a deep travail of thought. All at once she turned sharply round, hurried to the side of the bed, and began violently shaking her sleeping husband.

"Wake up! Wake up, Joe," she said in a loud voice.

Mr Wiseman was not easy to waken, but the energy of his wife's attack brought him to a sitting posture on the side of the bed in a very few seconds.

"Goodness gracious, my dear! what has happened? Is the house on fire?" He was now wide awake and really startled.

"The house isn't on fire, Joe; don't be a fool, but wake up. I want to talk to you about something very important."

"Yes, my dear; I'm wide awake, but a—won't the subject keep until to-morrow?"

"No, it won't keep two minutes. Now, mind, I'm in earnest, so don't aggravate me."

"Very well, my dear, what do you want to talk to me about?" said he, trying to suppress a yawn.

"I just want to talk to you about Providence."

Mr Wiseman turned his eyes sharply to his wife's face. "I think, my dear, that if you were to lie down, perhaps, you might feel better. Shall I get you a few drops of sal volatile?"

"Look here, Joe. If you want to make me just mad you will go on like that. I'm not sick, and I'm not dreaming, and you'll hear what I have to say if I have to make you sit here all night. I want

you to tell me, on your word as a man and a minister, whether you think that Providence made old Mr Lobbins choose me as his wife and selected Miss Perkins for you to marry?"

"Well, my dear, it's rather an important"—

"Now, Joe, I'll have a direct answer, or else you don't get to sleep again to-night. Did Providence specially ordain it?"

"Well, my dear, Providence at least permitted it, that is quite certain."

"Permitted fiddlesticks! Doesn't Providence in the same way permit of getting drunk, and stealing, and—and—doing all sorts of wicked things?"

"Quite true, my dear; it is all very mysterious. We can never hope to understand why evil is permitted, but we must not forget that, together with permitting evil, Providence provides the remedy. Even I, in my humble sphere of ministration, must look upon myself as an instrument provided by Providence to correct the evil I see around me. That is the great mercy, that next to the evil lies the means by which it may be counteracted."

"Joe, you are a dear old man, and you have made it *quite* clear to me about Providence. Now, look here, I want you to make me one promise, and when you have done so you may go to sleep as soon as ever you like."

"Well, my dear, you know that as an honest man I cannot make a promise blindly; it might bind me to something which my conscience"—

"It is not to do anything, but just to do nothing at all, that I want you to promise," interrupted his

wife. "For the next two days I want you simply to take no notice of anything out of the common that happens, and in any case not to interfere without coming to see me first."

"Well, my dear, I think I can safely promise that. But look here, can you not tell me what this means?"

"It means just this—and you can go and call it out in the streets to-morrow if you like—that I am not going to let old Bloxam snap up Stella Mason, nor am I going to see young Wardley hooked by Lavinia. Now, it's no use looking at me like that or saying another word, for I've *quite* made up my mind about it. I cannot tell you how I am going to manage, and if I could I would not, because you would 'look' it out even if you did not tell it. All you have to do is to keep quite quiet, take no notice of anything that happens, and come to me if you feel uneasy. Now you may kiss me, and then go to sleep."

After a few seconds she said in a softer voice.

"Joe."

"Yes, my dear."

"Supposing someone had helped us long ago, don't you think it would have saved Providence a great deal of trouble?"

"How so, my dear?"

"Well, you see, two people had to die before we could be happy, and even then we had lost four years of our life. Joe, I am determined that Bloxam shall not get Stella, even if I have to come into the church and forbid the marriage when you ask whether

anyone knows of any just cause, so you had better help me."

"Well, my dear, I have given my word not to interfere; I don't see how I can help in any way. Surely you don't want me to speak to Bloxam?"

"Not I. Fancy trying to get Bloxam to disobey the finger of Providence when it points to a pretty girl like Stella, just ready, as he thinks, to drop into his big mouth like a ripe plum. No, I *may* want your help, but I shall try and do without it. But if I *do* ask you to do anything, you had better just do it."

III

Next day an air of hushed expectancy seemed to envelop the Parsonage. Stella complained of a headache; she certainly looked rather pale, and her eyes had an unnatural brightness. Lavinia and Matilda appeared in garb which, although still severely simple, was more in accordance with current fashions than had hitherto been their rule. At breakfast they thawed just a little towards their hostess, and the glances they shot from time to time in Stella's direction was rather less acid than usual. Breakfast over, they retired to the drawing-room, after each had selected a book of most portentously moral tone from the well-stocked shelves of the Reverend Josiah. Here they sat together on the sofa like a statued group of the cardinal virtues, with Charity left out.

It was early in the afternoon when a whisper to the effect that the three suitors had arrived thrilled through the house. The wagons were outspanned in

an open space about three hundred yards away, and thither the Reverend Josiah hastened with a hearty welcome. The Parsonage was not equal to accommodating the three gentlemen, but they were expected to take their meals there although sleeping at the waggons, alongside which a tent was pitched.

The varied emotions swaying the three men were apparent in their faces and their demeanour as they accompanied Mr Wiseman to the Parsonage. Mr Bloxam's delighted anticipations shone out of his face, and his feet seemed to tread upon air. Mr Winterton appeared to be more impressed by the gravity of the situation than by its other aspects. His mouth was set in a hard line, his face was pale, and the pupils of his eyes were contracted to the size of pinpoints. Mr Wardley looked haggard, his feet shuffled as he walked, and the throbbing of his heart filled his ears with thunder. Mr Wiseman tried to be friendly, and made one or two attempts in the direction of jocularity, but his wife weighed heavily on him, and he felt crushed as though with the weight of an impending catastrophe.

The three brides-elect were sitting in the drawing-room with Mrs Wiseman when the party arrived. Stella had retired into a corner, where she sat in the shadow. When the door opened she saw the unmistakable face of Mr Bloxam radiant in the fore, and the pale, dejected visage of Mr Wardley, who was taller than either of his companions, bringing up the rear. After the formal introduction, some attempts were made at conversation, in the middle of which Mr and Mrs Wiseman, as was expected of

them, left the room. Then Mr Bloxam came to the front in his *rôle* of man of the world. His self-confidence had for the moment given way under the stress of his emotions, but now he was his own Bloxam again, and skilfully piloted the company over the troubled sea of restraint in which they had been drifting to a haven of disembarrassment. His conversation was mainly directed towards the two elder ladies, but he now and then addressed a remark to Stella, who maintained her seat in the corner. She and Mr Wardley exchanged one or two fleeting glances, each of which was followed by a painful blush. Mr Winterton, from the first, directed furtive attentions towards Matilda, and once, when the discreet cheek of that damsel flushed faintly under a glance of more than usually intent scrutiny, he turned a fiery red, coughed nervously, and looked away in confusion.

At the tea-table, afterwards, Mr Bloxam still took the conversational lead. Mrs Wiseman was sweetness personified, and ably seconded Mr Bloxam's efforts to keep the ball rolling. Stella sat silent and demure, and both Lavinia and Matilda gave evidence of the superiority of their minds by making discreet comments from time to time. Mr Wardley complained of a headache, and looked really ill. He and Stella had been placed at opposite corners, with the whole length of the table between them, and they now and then exchanged glances—brief as lightning-flashes, and as destructive to their peace of mind. When the ladies retired to the drawing-room, Wardley followed Mrs Wiseman to the passage,

and begged her to excuse him for the rest of the evening, as he felt too ill to remain. She accompanied him to the door, bade him good-night with a friendly pressure of the hand, and told him to keep up his spirits, as things might not be so bad as they appeared.

Mr Wardley returned to the wagons, and flung himself upon his bed in bitter agony of mind. Stella transcended all he had dreamt of her; and the first glance from her clear brown eyes had been to his heart like a match set to an inflammable pile. He loved her utterly and suddenly, and he at the same time realised how hopeless was his chance of winning her.

The counterpart of Wardley's love for Stella was an utter loathing of the idea of marriage with either of the others. His mind was made up; he would refuse to carry out the compact. He knew that this would cost him his position in the ministry, and the thought caused him acute and remorseful pain, for he believed thoroughly in the genuineness of his calling; but he felt that marriage with one of these women would, under his present dispositions, be a crime more deadly than any other he could commit. He was quite clear as to the course which he had to pursue; he would wait until Stella had been formally appropriated by Mr Bloxam, and then steal quietly away to some spot where he could hide his shame and grief, leaving a brief letter for Mr Wiseman, with some sort of an explanation of his conduct.

In the meantime the course of events at the Parsonage ran smoothly. Mr Bloxam was not very

successful in his efforts to become confidential with Stella, who clung to Mrs Wiseman like a frightened child, and could not be enticed from her side. He was very gallant with Miss Lavinia, but guardedly so; and he carefully abstained from giving her any grounds for inferring that his attentions were based on anything more than mere civility. Mr Winterton and Miss Matilda made great strides in their intimacy; they got into a corner quite early in the evening, and remained there playing solitaire. Towards the end they had quite a gamesome little scuffle over the last marble but one, when the chaste Matilda archly attempted to cheat in the most barefaced and obvious manner. The rest of the company left them quite undisturbed, and, in fact, rather ostentatiously ignored them. The only one who took the least notice of their sedate flirtation was Stella, who shot glances of fearful curiosity into their corner now and then, and thought with dismay that she and Mr Bloxam would most probably soon be similarly situated.

At length the hour for prayers struck, and all moved into the dining-room. As the senior stranger, Mr Bloxam was called upon to give an exhortation, and, in complying, he did justice to the occasion. He had all the texts of Scripture that deal with marriage at his tongue's tip, and he painted the moral advantages of that holy estate with such fervour and fluency that the thought crossed Stella's mind that he must be a widower in disguise, and she wondered whether this would not be a valid excuse for her refusing to marry him, as the three had been

represented as bachelors in the first instance. Then she smiled to herself at the foolishness of her imaginings, and again surrendered to the feeling of numbing despair which had been creeping over her.

After the discourse came a short, fervent, and very explicit prayer for the special interposition of Providence at the present very important juncture, at the end of which Mrs Wiseman's enunciation of the "Amen" was heard so loudly and distinctly above the other voices, that her husband started violently and looked round at her in obvious alarm.

In bidding Stella "good-night," Mr Bloxam put so much expression into his voice, and so much unction into the pressure of his hand, that the girl had to clench her teeth hard to keep from screaming. Mr Winterton and Matilda developed their idyll over the solitaire board to the very end of the evening. After prayers she fetched the board from the drawing-room for the purpose of showing him a puzzle she had learnt from a lady friend who was champion solitaire player of the village she lived in, and this engrossed them until the moment of departure. It was then that Mr Bloxam indulged in his first piece of badinage. He said to Stella, with something which looked atrociously like a wink, and in a voice that all could hear, that he supposed Brother Winterton was making the most of what remained of his "solitaire" condition, and he added with an inflection of tenderness in his voice, that this condition was now nearly at an end for all of them. Brother Winterton hung his head shamefacedly,

Matilda was covered with becoming confusion, and Stella winced as though struck with a whip.

On the way back to the wagons the two ardent swains paused for a few minutes' conversation beneath the glowing stars. "Would it be amiss if I were to ask whether you feel your inclinations being guided in any particular direction?" asked Mr Bloxam.

"Since you inquire, I will tell you that Miss Whitmore is the one towards whom I feel attracted," replied Mr Winterton, without hesitation.

After a pause, which gave the idea that he waited to be questioned, Mr Bloxam said in a nervous tone :—

"Since you have given me your confidence, Winterton, I will tell you that some influence, such as I have never before experienced, seems to draw me towards Miss Mason. In these matters we must believe that we are guided through our inclinations, and I have determined not to be disobedient to the pleasing monition. I shall propose for Miss Mason's hand to-morrow."

"What a pity Wardley is indisposed," said Mr Winterton, after a moment's pause. "I hope he recognises his fore-ordained helpmeet in Miss Simpson, as we do in the ladies of our choice."

"I think Miss Simpson will suit Wardley admirably," said Mr Bloxam, quickly; "he is just the man who ought to marry one older than himself. You see how delicate he is, and it is meet that his wife be one whose age and experience fits her to take care of him."

"Ye-e-s," replied Mr Winterton.

"I think," rejoined Mr Bloxam, "that as Wardley is unwell to-night we had better not excite him by discussing these important subjects in his hearing."

"I quite agree with you," replied Mr Winterton.

. . . . .

When Mrs Wiseman went to bid Stella "good-night" she found the girl sobbing on her pillow as if her heart were breaking.

"Cheer up, my deary," said the kind woman; "things may not be as bad as you think. Look here, I want you to-morrow to do exactly as I tell you to, and ask no questions. Will you promise to do so?"

"Yes," whispered Stella through her sobs.

"Very well, then. To-morrow morning, first thing, you are to write a note to that young man you made friends with on board ship asking him to come up and take lunch with us."

Stella nodded.

"When the reply comes you are to look hurriedly at the letter, put it into your pocket without opening it, and leave the room."

Stella again nodded.

"You are to return in a few minutes, and sit down again without saying a word about the letter."

Stella again nodded. She was now drying her tears, and the look on her face was decidedly less woebegone than it had been a few moments previously.

"Now, look here," said Mrs Wiseman, "keep up your spirits; I will get you and young Wardley out of this if I possibly can. You have just got to

do exactly what I tell you. I am very glad that he is sick and out of the way just now. Good-night, my deary; keep your spirits up, and all will come right, or else my name isn't Louisa Wiseman."

IV

Next morning Mrs Wiseman rose very early and went downstairs to her husband's study, where she locked herself in for about half an hour. She then went and sought for Stella, whom she found sitting in her room dressed. She sent her down to the study, telling her to write the letter inviting young Ramsay to lunch, warning her at the same time not to mention the fact of the invitation to anyone. The invitation Mrs Wiseman enclosed to the local agent for the *Silver Lining*, who happened to be a friend of hers, asking him as a particular favour to send it out by a special messenger to the vessel, and to transmit any reply that might come under cover to herself personally.

At breakfast-time Mr Wardley was reported to be still very unwell; however, as he distinctly refused to see a doctor, no alarm was felt on his account. It was, of course, felt that his absence caused a hitch in the otherwise harmonious proceedings. After breakfast Mrs Wiseman went up to the wagons to see him, and returned with the report that, although he was undoubtedly ill and quite unable to appear at present, he would most probably be sufficiently recovered to put in an appearance in the course of the afternoon. When Mrs Wiseman made this announce-

ment, her husband looked extremely uneasy, and after a few moments got up and hurriedly left the room. Both Mr Bloxam and Mr Winterton looked at Lavinia with expressions of commiseration, whilst she maintained a demeanour which suggested subdued tenderness and resignation.

The Parsonage grounds were rich with trees, and thus afforded suitable localities for amatory dalliance. In its bosky recesses many a clerical swain had sported with his Amaryllis in the shade, and thither the ardent Winterton led his coy Matilda soon after breakfast, and elicited, after becoming hesitancy, her blushing acceptance of his hand and heart. When he attempted to seal the compact with an embrace, she disengaged herself with a twittering little scream from his unaccustomed arms and fled. Her confusion, however, was such that she did not run towards the house, but into a thick shrubbery which lay in quite another direction. Thither Mr Winterton followed without a moment's hesitation, and the twittering scream was repeated, but in a rather fainter tone. However, Matilda must have forgiven her lover whatever liberties he may have taken, for when they returned together to the house not very long afterwards they both looked extremely happy, and were apparently the best of friends.

Stella kept close to Mrs Wiseman, and a great deal of unsuccessful diplomacy was exercised by Mr Bloxam with the object of obtaining a *tête-à-tête* with the object of his growing passion. At length a reply to Stella's letter arrived from Mr Ramsay. It had been, as arranged, sent in a cover addressed to Mrs

Wiseman. She at once took it to her husband, who was sitting, a prey to great nervousness, in his study.

"Joe," she said in a tone that admitted of neither contradiction nor argument, "in five minutes exactly you are to send the servant with that letter to Miss Mason in the drawing-room."

She then hurried from the room, without giving him time to reply, and went to where poor Stella was awaiting her in a fever of trembling suspense. She took the girl's arm and hurried her to the drawing-room, where the enamoured Bloxam was sitting, apparently absorbed in the perusal of a book which he was holding upside down. When close to the door, she whispered hurriedly to the girl—

"Remember what I told you to do when the letter comes. After you have returned we will all three go to the summer-house in the garden. Do you understand?"

"Yes," whispered Stella.

"Now, you must attend particularly to what I tell you. When we have been in the summer-house for a few minutes I will stand up and leave; just afterwards I will call to you, and you must follow me at once, without looking after you or picking up anything you may see lying about. Do you understand?"

Stella answered with a hasty nod, and the two then entered the drawing-room.

"What do you say to a walk in the garden under this young lady's guidance?" asked Mrs Wiseman, with an arch glance at Mr Bloxam.

"Certainly—I shall be delighted."

"Very well, I shall leave you to entertain each other. I must now see about doing something for poor Mr Wardley. I feel *so* sorry on account of his being in trouble just now."

At this moment a knock was heard at the door, and a servant entered with a letter for Stella. She took it with looks of extreme confusion, and, without even asking to be excused, stood up at once, and ran from the room. Mrs Wiseman looked after her with a smile, and then turned a beaming face on Mr Bloxam, who seemed puzzled and uneasy. After a couple of minutes, Stella returned, and Mrs Wiseman then stood up at once.

"Now, Stella, if you have *quite* finished reading that very interesting letter, we will take Mr Bloxam to the summer-house, where I shall formally hand him over to you to entertain. Come along."

They sauntered down the garden-walk, Mrs Wiseman and Stella walking arm-in-arm in front, and Mr Bloxam, a prey to delighted anticipation and vague uneasiness, following closely. Ever since the episode of the letter a sense of insecurity had weighed on him, and he felt like one walking over ground where pitfalls were imminent. They reached the summer-house. It was an arbour covered with trailing Banksia roses, and into the tender gloom of which the light trickled through tangled greenery. They entered; Mrs Wiseman and Stella sat down together on a rustic bench, and Mr Bloxam, after a moment's hesitation, took a seat next to Stella.

"Now," said Mrs Wiseman, with an arch inflection in her voice, "I will leave you two to entertain

each other. I have to see about my housekeeping, you know. But I daresay you will not miss me very much."

With that she stood up and walked away in a manner marvellously light and springy for one of her weight. As she disappeared she threw back a nod over her shoulder with what Mr Bloxam took to be a friendly and sympathetic smile.

Poor Stella sat staring rigidly before her, convulsively grasping the woodwork of the rustic seat, and wondering as to what terrifying development things were now about to take. The moment was one of the few in Mr Bloxam's life in which he experienced the sensation of bashfulness. He tried hard to think of some effective way of opening the conversation, but the field of rhetoric which he had assiduously cultivated was struck suddenly with blight, and yielded him never a flower at his need. Stella strained her expectant ears to catch Mrs Wiseman's voice. Mr Bloxam cleared his nervous throat for the third time, and Stella knew, although she could not see them, that his lips were forming to the speech she so much dreaded. Then the longed-for diversion came; a step was heard on the gravelled walk outside, and, after a judiciously loud "Ahem!" Mrs Wiseman appeared in the doorway. Stella looked up at her with eyes full of helpless appeal. Mr Bloxam was still the prey to bashfulness.

"It is really *too* tiresome; but I find I must ask you to excuse Stella for just a few minutes, Mr Bloxam. Now, don't be cross; she will be back

just now. Mind," shaking her finger at him, "you are not to move out of the summer-house until she returns."

Stella joined Mrs Wiseman at the door and accompanied her to the house. Mr Bloxam was, as a matter of fact, extremely glad of the interruption, for he felt he could now collect his thoughts, and thus by the time Stella returned he would be in a position to express his passion in terms of appropriate eloquence. He closed his eyes and leant back in the rustic seat. The ferment in his bosom was, however, too great to admit of his remaining quiet for long, so he stood up and began to pace to and fro.

But what was that lying on the seat from which Stella had just risen? It appeared to be a letter which must have fallen out of her pocket as she stood up. It was folded into a square of about two inches, and the writing was evidently that of a man. He would put it into his pocket and return it to her when she came back. Just then the fact of Stella's having received a letter in the drawing-room, and the suspiciously confused manner in which she had thereafter left the apartment, loomed up before his mind in ugly prominence. He had been extremely curious about that letter. Who could it have been from? Perhaps from some fellow-passenger. Well, she would be his wife to-morrow (rapturous thought), so there could be no objection to his knowing all about her correspondence. After the usual manner of elderly husbands of young wives, he had strong views as to the advantages of absolute

confidence between spouses. He would not mind her reading every letter he had written or received during the past twenty years. Well, she would be back in a few minutes, so he must waste no time if he really meant to gratify what was only a reasonable curiosity, Pshaw! it was but a trifle, after all. Why make such a pother about it? He sat down, opened the sheet carefully, so as to be able to refold it in exactly the same manner, and began to read (the document had no date)—

"My Dearest,—I am very, very sorry that I cannot come and see you to-day, but I am hard at work, and I cannot get leave. Please, like a dear little girl, meet me again in the arbour. I will be there to-night at the same hour. Be sure and leave the gate open. It is very cruel of you to insist on my giving up the few letters of yours I have. Don't you remember that you promised to write to me every month as long as you live? Ah! if we could only live through these happy months again!

"Yours, lovingly, D. R.

"P.S.—Don't forget the garden gate."

As Mr Bloxam read, beads of perspiration gathered on his forehead, and the veins of his temples became like knotted cords. He read the incriminating missive two or three times, and on each perusal the revelation seemed to become more and more atrocious. The face of Stella became hateful to him. "D. R." Who was "D. R."? Some fellow on board ship, no doubt. To think that *she*—to whom he had so narrowly escaped being linked for life—was one who could make guilty appointments with a lover just on the verge of her entrance into the

holy estate of matrimony with a minister of the Gospel. Why, the very spot where he was sitting was polluted by their guilty caresses! No wonder the abandoned creature had looked perturbed. He would go and denounce her to Mr Wiseman without further delay. Crushing the letter in his indignant hand, he left the summer-house and hurried up the garden path. Mr Wiseman, however, he could not find. He felt he must speak to someone. Mr Winterton and Matilda had gone to the shore to gather shells. Mrs Wiseman was nowhere to be seen. After pausing in the passage, he entered the drawing-room, and there found Lavinia deeply engrossed in an improving book. He seized a chair hurriedly, drew it close to her, and sat down.

"Miss Simpson," he said, in a voice broken by excitement, "may I ask you a few questions in the strictest confidence?"

"Certainly, Mr Bloxam," said Lavinia with alacrity.

"Miss Simpson, did you notice anything remarkable in the behaviour of Miss Mason on the voyage?"

"Well, Mr Bloxam," said Lavinia, with an appearance of reluctance, "I should not have said anything about it if you had not asked me the question; but I certainly did notice conduct on Miss Mason's part which I very much disapproved of."

"Might I ask you to be explicit on this point?"

"Well, what both Miss Whitmore and I objected to in Miss Mason's conduct was the way in which she used to—I do not even like to use the word—

but 'flirt'—with one of the officers of the ship. In fact, we thought it our duty to remonstrate with her on the subject; but what we said did no good."

"Might I ask the name of this officer?"

"Certainly. His name was Mr Donald Ramsay."

"Thank you, Miss Simpson."

Mr Bloxam leant back in his chair, the prey to conflicting thoughts and tumultuous emotions. He rapidly reviewed the situation. His house was furnished; he had, on the eve of his departure, addressed a meeting of his congregation and announced that he was about to take upon his shoulders the responsibilities of the married state. A welcome was, he knew, being prepared for his bride. The Sabbath-school children had arranged to present her with an address, which had already been drafted by the schoolmaster of the Mission. The very invitations to a tea-meeting on a large scale had been issued. He could never face the ordeal of returning without a wife. Stella had been conclusively proved to be a vessel of abominable things; Matilda, owing to his foolish precipitancy in surrendering his right of pre-emption, had been annexed by Mr Winterton. Lavinia only remained. He would endow Lavinia with his belated affections.

"Miss Simpson" (he found that now he had not the least difficulty in expressing himself fluently), "it has been made clear to my heart that Providence has ordained that you should be a helpmeet unto me. Do you think you could confidently place your life and happiness in my keeping?"

Lavinia thought she could.

V

Mrs Wiseman hurried Stella up to the house from the arbour, and took her straight to her bedroom. Stella submitted without the least question. Mrs Wiseman gently forced her down on the bed, with her face turned to the wall, spread a light counterpane over her, told her in a whisper to lie quite still, patted her affectionately on the shoulder, and left the room. Then she hurried along the passage to Lavinia's room, which she found empty. She then went to the drawing-room, and peeped in. There sat Lavinia—so absorbed in the improving book, that she did not even notice the intrusion of her hostess upon her moral researches. Mrs Wiseman then hurried to her own bedroom, locked the door on the inside, and took a seat at a window overlooking the path leading from the house to the arbour. Here she sat, like a portly spider behind a web of white lace curtain, which effectually concealed her from view from the outside.

Before she had waited very long she saw Mr Bloxam hurrying past her to the house. His lips were white, and were pressed firmly together; his eyes glinted with baleful light; thunder lurked among the wrinkles of his brow. She heard his stamping footsteps lead to the study of Mr Wiseman, who, however, had been carefully got rid of for the whole forenoon by a stroke of Machiavellian diplomacy. She trembled with excitement, and felt her heart sink with an anxiety which was not all painful. The deep-laid plot she had woven had

been so far successful, and now events had only to develop one stage farther upon their natural course for her efforts to be crowned with complete triumph. Things had reached a most critical stage, and much depended upon whether Mr Bloxam left the home in dudgeon to seek for Mr Wiseman or went into the drawing-room where Lavinia was sitting, engaged in the perfecting of her superior mind. Mrs Wiseman recognised the danger of Mr Bloxam's first seeing her husband, whose ridiculous conscientiousness might possibly lead to complications ; but her knowledge of the clerical variety of human nature told her with no uncertain voice that, once in the drawing-room, his doom would be sealed. She heard him falter in the passage, and her heart rose to her throat in a lump. Then she heard the sound of his footsteps leading in the desired direction, and just afterwards, the well-known creak caused by the closing of the drawing-room door smote on her delighted ear. She gave a gasping sigh of relief, stood up, and, regardless of the continued stability of the building, executed a ponderous war-dance around the room.

After she had thus relieved her overwrought feelings, Mrs Wiseman opened the door and stepped quietly down the passage to the dining-room, where she took her seat within sight of the closed drawing-room door. Here she sat like a fowler watching a net in which valuable prey is just in the act of entangling itself. After a short interval the door opened, and Mr Bloxam emerged with Lavinia leaning on his arm. Lavinia's face wore an expression

of discreet satisfaction, but Mr Bloxam looked by no means so rapturous.

Mrs Wiseman advanced towards the couple with a smile in which it would be hard to tell whether amiability or innocence was the more conspicuous.

"Oh, Mr Bloxam," she sweetly said, "Stella asked me to excuse her to you; the poor child felt suddenly faint, and had to go to her room and lie down."

Mr Bloxam regarded her with an intent look of instinctive suspicion, which, however, glanced off abashed from the guilelessness of her mien. Then he said, in measured and unenthusiastic tone—

"We await your congratulations; Miss Simpson has consented to be my wife."

Mrs Wiseman's felicitations were ardent exceedingly. She even went the length of kissing the coy Lavinia on her chaste lips. Just then she was so delighted at the complete success of her scheme that she would not have minded kissing Mr Bloxam himself. She watched the newly-engaged couple saunter down the garden and disappear into the shrubbery that had veiled the initial transports of Mr Winterton and Matilda. Then she hurried to the room where Stella was lying on her bed a prey to the deepest misery, clasped that dejected damsel to her motherly bosom, and told the good news in disjointed words. Stella broke into a springtide shower of happy tears, and clung to her preserver from the matrimonial toils of Bloxam, the ogre, like a nestling child. Mrs Wiseman, after kissing the girl affectionately, and telling her to remain quietly where she

was, left the room. She immediately wrote a note to Mr Wardley, telling him of the blissful turn which events had taken, and recommending him as well to keep out of the way for the present. This note she despatched to the wagons by a servant.

Soon Mr Wiseman, accompanied by Mr Winterton and Matilda, whom he had met on the road home, arrived. They each and all expressed the liveliest astonishment at the news. Mr Wiseman, in particular, looked perturbed, and the looks he bent on the smiling face of his wife were full of pathetic perplexity. Then the couple who formed the subject of discussion arrived from the garden. Lavinia at once darted to her room so as to conceal her blushes, and Mr Bloxam immediately requested the other two gentlemen to accompany him to the study for the purpose of discussing a matter of most serious importance. Matilda hastened to congratulate Lavinia, and Mrs Wiseman, with a certain amount of trepidation noticeable in her mien, went off to prepare for luncheon.

Mrs Wiseman was nervously preparing a salad in the pantry when she received a message requesting her immediate presence in the study. After the victorious climax to her insidious machinations a reaction had set in, and she now felt distinctly uncomfortable. When she entered the study she found her husband at his desk, with a Rhadamanthine expression on his usually serene face. Mr Winterton was sitting at his left hand, looking like the assessor of a Nonconformist Holy Office, and Mr Bloxam was standing before the two in the attitude and with

the expression as of a stout, middle-aged accusing angel. Before Rhadamanthus was outspread the incriminating letter. A solemn silence reigned in the chamber, and the partially drawn curtain caused an appropriate gloom. Under the stress of the situation Mrs Wiseman completely regained her self-possession, and her look of guilelessness clothed her like an armour of proof. Mr Winterton arose and politely handed her a chair.

"Louisa," said Mr Wiseman, in a Rhadamanthine tone, "Mr Bloxam has brought a very unpleasant matter to our notice—a matter which, I regret to say, seriously affects the character of one who is our guest, but who is, I fear, not a fit inmate for any Christian household."

"Dear me," said Mrs Wiseman, "what a dreadful thing; but whoever can it be?"

"I regret to have to tell you that the person I refer to is Miss Mason."

"What! Stella? Surely not!"

"I regret, Louisa, to have to say that there can be no doubt on the subject."

"Dear me; I *am* sorry. I have got so fond of the girl. Is there no mistake? Whatever has she done?"

"I regret, Louisa, that no possibility of there being any mistake in the matter exists. It appears, to take events in their proper sequence, that both Miss Simpson and Miss Whitmore noticed signs of most reprehensible frivolity in Miss Mason's conduct on the voyage, and their sense of duty even compelled them to take the unpleasant step of re-

monstrating with her for encouraging the attentions of a certain Mr Ramsay, one of the officers of the ship. This morning Mr Bloxam found a letter which had evidently been dropped by Miss Mason, and which, there can be no reasonable doubt, was written to her by this Ramsay. It is a document which, under the circumstances, reveals an amount of depravity absolutely shocking, and we must all, and especially Mr Bloxam, be humbly thankful to Providence that the true character of this whited sepulchre, who is so fair externally, has been revealed in time. I have now to request you to bring the shameless girl here, so that she may be confronted with the proof of her guilt."

"What a dreadful thing!" said Mrs Wiseman, in a bated tone; "I will fetch her at once. May I have a look at the letter?"

"Here is the letter, Louisa; it is hardly fit for the perusal of any lady; but you are a minister's wife, and have reached an age at which one may have knowledge of this class of evil without suffering moral damage."

Mrs Wiseman gave a perceptible sniff at the reference to her age.

Her husband lifted the letter by one of its corners between the reluctant tips of a defilement-fearing finger and thumb, and passed it across the table to her. She received it in the same manner, and held it almost at arm's length.

"Oh!" she said with a start of surprise, "how *could* you suspect the poor girl of having anything to do with a thing like this? Why, I picked this

letter up in the street this morning when I was returning from my visit to Mr Wardley. I meant to have shown it to you; I must have dropped it out of my pocket in the summer-house."

"But," said the careful Mr Winterton, "may not the note after all have been intended for Miss Mason. The initials correspond with those of Mr Ramsay, and we are told that their conduct on the voyage was very suspicious."

"Stuff and nonsense!" replied Mrs Wiseman. "Stella told me all about young Ramsay, who is engaged to a girl in Scotland. Besides, the letter is not in his handwriting. I got Stella to write him a note asking him to come to luncheon to-day, and here is his reply; you can see that the writing is quite different."

Mr Bloxam gave a gasp of relief when Stella's innocence was established, but he suddenly remembered Lavinia, and a look of such abject misery came into his face that Mrs Wiseman felt a twinge of regret at the success of her plan. Mr Wiseman collapsed into abject helplessness; he felt he had been a party to some dark plot, and his wife became, for the moment, terrible to him. She, however, relieved the tension of the situation by saying—

"You have all been guilty of a cruel injustice to poor Stella, and the least atonement you can make is to say nothing whatever about this business to anyone. It would cause Mr Wardley, besides, great annoyance if he were to hear that she had been suspected in this manner. Let us try to forget all about it. Luncheon will be ready in a few minutes."

In the course of the afternoon Stella, although still rather pallid and extremely nervous, discovered that she felt well enough to come to the drawing-room, and it was at about the same time that Mr Wardley found himself sufficiently recovered to walk down to the Parsonage. He also looked pale, and there was an alarming brightness about his eye. Mrs Wiseman ushered him into the drawing-room in which Stella was sitting alone, closed the door on him, and mounted guard at the passage.

After a reasonable interval Mrs Wiseman, who had been sadly neglecting her housekeeping duties whilst following the dark and devious paths of intrigue, tapped at the door. Mr Wardley arose, drew Stella's arm within his own, and advanced to meet the good conspirator. The faces of the lovers shone with such radiant happiness that any twinges of remorse she felt with reference to the part she had played disappeared for ever. She wept for very joy of sympathy, and rejoiced as Jael did after her treacherous undoing of Sisera, at the laying of the foundation-stone of this edifice of happiness which had been hewn from the quarries of circumstance by her own reprehensible hands.

It is not necessary to refer to subsequent events otherwise than in the most general terms, with the exception of a conversation which took place on the night of the day upon which all these important occurrences took place. By the time Mrs Wiseman felt justified in resting from her labours incidental to preparing for the triple wedding which was to be solemnised on the following day, the night was

somewhat far spent. Then she had to go and enjoy a final gush over Stella, and take a hurried survey of that enraptured damsel's wardrobe, which, so great had been the general preoccupation during the past week, she had not even given a passing thought to. What with one thing and another, it was midnight before she retired to her bedroom. One circumstance may possibly have weighed with her in indulging herself in such a long dawdle in Stella's room—namely, that she was just a little bit afraid of a *tête-à-tête* with her husband, and she wanted to give him ample opportunity of going to sleep before she joined him. However, when she entered the room, she found him wide awake and looking like Rhadamanthus in an extremly bad temper.

"My goodness, Joe, are you still awake?"

"Yes, Louisa; and so will you be until I hear a full explanation of the events of to-day."

"Very well, Joe; where shall I begin? Pray do not forget that you assisted me in bringing about what happened after I told you what I was working for."

Mr Wiseman groaned heavily in spirit. This fact, which his wife so flippantly reminded him of, had been rankling all day in his hitherto blameless conscience like a torturing thorn. The other thing that caused him acute misery was the suspicion that his wife had told him a falsehood.

"Louisa, you said you picked up that letter in the street. Was that statement true?"

"Of course it was." She answered him with

indignant asperity. "May I inquire if you suspect me of telling a lie?"

"Louisa, do you know how the letter came to be in the street before you picked it up?"

"Of course I do. I dropped it there myself."

Mr Wiseman groaned heavily in body and turned his face to the wall. He now realised for the first time that there is a feminine code of ethics which is radically different in some important respects from the masculine, and he recognised the hopelessness of further discussion.

. . . . . .

Next day the triple wedding was duly solemnised by the Reverend Josiah, and the three couples departed in their several wagons for their respective homes. There is good ground for believing that as marriages go, these unions resulted in a highly satisfactory average of happiness.

The Prince and Princess, of course, sailed down the flowing stream of their days in a shallop with a fortunate keel, drawn by a sail which was ever arched to the balmy breath of happy gales. Mr Winterton and Matilda lived for a satisfactory number of years, and were continually discovering new and admirable qualities in each other. Their many good works are still bearing fruit in the little village in which they dwelt; and the gorgeous hues of the smoking-caps and slippers with which the industrious and devoted Matilda used to clothe the upper and nether extremities of her spouse are still vivid in the memories of the older inhabitants.

It is only doing Mr Bloxam justice to say that

he came out of his painful ordeal like a gentleman. From the ruins of the fabric of anticipated bliss, in which he had fondly dreamt of dwelling by the side of the beauteous Stella, he built what proved to be a durable tenement of unpretentious design, in which he and Lavinia lived for many days in sober comfort. His sufferings at first were extremely bitter, and it is high praise of his manliness to say that he concealed their existence from his wife. Had he but known it, his life with Lavinia was far more satisfactory than it could possibly have been with Stella. It has been said that Mrs Bloxam found her husband's temper very trying during the first few years of their married life, but that things mended in this respect as time went on, and that the esteem which these two learned to feel for each other made the autumn of their united life like unto a calm, rich-skied Indian summer.

A CASE FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

I

"We are such stuff as dreams are made of."

Once upon a time it was my hap to dwell in a certain town in the Eastern Province of Cape Colony, which will not be recognised under the name of Hilston. With a population of about a thousand Europeans, it bore a strong resemblance to several other communities in the same province. It contained the usual disproportionate number of churches and liquor-shops, the usual utter absence of anything like Christianity as a rule of life—or, in fact, as anything but a mere form—the usual number of persons whose only occupation appeared to be that of killing time, and the usual intellectual dry-rot and deadly dulness. The morning market was the great rendezvous for the gossips. Here, around the butter- and vegetable-laden tables would the neighbouring farmers and their town cronies foregather every week-day morning; here they would swop mild and superannuated jokes, rank tobacco, scandalous tales, and insinuations more or less damaging to their neighbours' characters.

Being engaged upon special duty, and living in daily expectation of having to move on to new official pastures, I had taken up my abode at a small hotel near the outskirts, my choice of a sojourning

place being determined by the comparative nocturnal quiet of the vicinity. Here I dwelt in moderate comfort tempered by accidents which it is needless to specify.

By far the most interesting feature of Hilston, to me at least, was old Isaac, the septuagenarian billiard-marker at the hotel where I lodged and boarded. Isaac (it may be premised that he had, once upon a time, possessed a surname, although all trace of it was lost) had a phenomenally bad temper and an exceedingly bitter tongue. Being badly hump-backed, he was only about three feet nine in height. Twenty-eight years previously he had drifted as a tramp to Hilston, whence no one knew, and had been employed as a stable-hand by the then proprietor of the hotel. Eight years after this the establishment changed hands, and Isaac was taken over with the other fixtures. The new proprietor, a young man with a little capital at his command, built a billiard-room and imported a brand new and first-class table. Isaac, to his great satisfaction, was appointed marker, and he at once experienced what was probably the one great passion of his life, for he fell violently in love with his charge. It was said that he had been more than once watched through the window, when alone in the room, rubbing his cheek softly over the new, silky, green cloth, and that he was wont to stand for an hour at a time, when no players were about, gently passing his hand over the sides and fondling the cushions.

When I made the acquaintance of the table and its custodian, they looked equally the worse for wear.

The original cloth was still doing duty, but was patched and darned in nearly a dozen places. In spite of the shabby attire, however, Isaac still loved his mistress with ardour and constancy. The proprietor informed me confidentially that he would long since have invested in a new cloth and cushions but for the strenuous way in which the old man opposed any suggestion towards a change. He still slept, as he had done for twenty years, rolled up in an old rug on one of the lumpy benches provided for the use of spectators, and no matter how late the habitual loafers, who practically lived in the room, or the gilded youth of the town, who now and then gambled mildly over the clicking ivories, kept up their threepenny black pool, he carefully dusted down his darling, and covered her with a drab holland cloth before retiring to rest on his narrow and uneven couch.

In South African towns of the Hilston class there are neither clubs, theatres nor music-halls. The billiard-room is, therefore, the only place of general resort for relaxation, and in it you will meet the local male inhabitant, or the greater part of him, in his most interesting—that is to say in his most natural—mood. Here he is relaxed and unconstrained ; here he joins with his fellows in a brotherhood which, although temporary, is often renewed ; here the tobacco-smoke cloud unites those who create it in a common humanity, and even seems to inspire those who breathe it with a common human soul. Many of the associations of the billiard-room are, no doubt, unedifying ; but so long as man re-

mains a gregarious animal, so long will he seek out some spot in which to meet his fellows without restraint. In my individual case the billiard-room was the only place in the hotel suitable for smoking in ; consequently I spent a great deal of time in it, especially in the evenings.

In the very early stage of our acquaintanceship I won old Isaac's heart by remonstrating with a semi-intoxicated player for allowing burning tobacco to fall from his pipe upon the cloth. Soon after I got an inkling of the old man's affection for his charge I began, for the sake of amusement, to play up to it ; then the evident genuineness of the feeling gained my involuntary respect, and I could not avoid being struck by the pathos of the situation.

As our acquaintance grew, Isaac became more and more confidential, and I was astonished at the critical faculty displayed in his caustic comments upon the different frequenters of the billiard-room. He had the faculty of ticking people off in a terse phrase of epigrammatic force and inevitable application. Being more or less of a butt for cheap witticisms on the part of those among whom his daily life was thrown, Isaac cordially disliked nine people out of every ten whom he knew. One of the favourite diversions of the gilded youth was to abuse the table in the old marker's hearing, and to compare its capabilities unfavourably with those of the rival hotel up the street. This Isaac would stand for a time, but when the limit of endurance had been reached, he would break into a withering storm of profane invective such as I have never heard

equalled. His power of venting ingenious and fantastic scurrility on these occasions might have rivalled that of Thersites, the "deformed and scurrilous Grecian."

Over and over again has he told me the history of each individual tear in the cloth. Two of the worst of these had been perpetrated nearly ten years' previously, and, although the perpetrators were still constant frequenters of the room, Isaac had never from the dates of their respective delinquencies spoken a word to either of them. When one of these persons lost a game and thus had to pay for the use of the table, Isaac would silently hold out a claw-like hand for the money, and no matter how brutal the chaff to which he might be subjected, he could never be provoked to retort.

One morning, after I had been for about two months a resident at the hotel, I entered the billiard-room, and there found Isaac sitting on the bench and weeping bitterly. His head was bowed upon his hands, and his poor twisted frame shook to the violence of his sobs. A large parcel lay next to him ; one end of this had been opened and a new cloth thus revealed. It was quite clear what had happened : the evil and much-dreaded day had arrived ; the old cloth was about to be discarded and another substituted. As a matter of fact the proprietor of the rival table up the street had invested in a new cloth and cushions, and consequently was drawing away custom in an alarming manner. Isaac's master had at length put his foot down, and Isaac's darling was to be re-clothed and re-cushioned. This

Isaac regarded more or less as Mr Ruskin would regard draping the "Venus de Medicis" in a velveteen polonaise.

"I'd rather they took off my skin and put new calves to my legs," he said between his sobs. "If I only knowed where to get gunpowder I'd blow the two of us up."

I tried to reason with him, but he turned and withered me, in company with the proprietor and everyone else he could think of, in a blast of anathema that would have made a pope of the Middle Ages weep with envy, so I beat a hasty retreat.

Later in the day Isaac was reported to be very ill. Next morning I found him crouched on his face among pillows in a comfortable little room which formed a lean-to at the side of the stable. He was breathing stertorously and evidently had not long to live. When I addressed him he looked up at me with pain-shot eyes, but appeared to be unable to reply. Sounds of tacking could be heard coming from the direction of the billiard-room; the old cloth was being removed and the new one fixed in its place. A man named Scarren was sitting at the bedside; every now and then he puffed strong tobacco-smoke into the sick man's face. This, Scarren explained in a whisper, was done at Isaac's request. I noticed that when Scarren, during the conversation with me, allowed a longer interval than usual to elapse without puffing, Isaac became very uneasy.

Isaac died during the night. I forget exactly how the doctor who attended him described his

malady, but judging from the length of the name it must have been something as uncommon as deadly. My private, unprofessional opinion was that the poor old man had died of a broken heart. Strange, that for the commonest of all diseases there should be no medical name—to say nothing of a cure.

Next day old Isaac's body was carried to its resting-place in the pretty little cemetery, in the beautifying of which the inhabitants of Hilston spent a lot of money, which would have been far better devoted to sanitation, the same being very badly needed. Scarren, two of the regular votaries at the billiard-room and myself were the only mourners. Before the body was placed in the coffin I had, with the consent of the proprietor, laid the old cloth, neatly folded, where the worn-out body would rest upon it. The editor of the local paper heard of this circumstance and took me roundly to task for what he called my "heartless practical joke at the expense of a dead man." I had, just previously, been the means of having a heavy reduction effected in his bill for some Government printing, the details of which proved, upon examination, to be as untrustworthy as his leading articles.

Scarren was installed as marker in old Isaac's place. He was an old, shrivelled-up man of few words but many pipes, of the worst tobacco I have ever inhaled the smoke of. Scarren and Isaac had been great cronies, although the one had been as loquacious as the other was silent. However, in spite of his reserve there was a twinkle in Scarren's eye which suggested latent humorous possibilities.

He had been a hanger-on at the hotel for several years, making a precarious living by doing odd jobs. The occupation he loved most was fishing, especially for eels. As a rule, before you had conversed with him for five minutes upon any subject whatever, he would produce from his pocket what had once been a fish-hook, which ought to have been capable of holding a moderately-sized shark, but which was now a straight bar of iron with a barb at one end. The straightening-out had, he said, been effected in the following manner: One night he had hooked an enormous eel. Finding his strength unequal to landing the prey he tied the line to an adjacent thorn-tree, which swayed violently to the monster's frantic tugs. All at once the stress on the line ceased and Scarren thought it had broken; but no, it was the hook that had given way, for when he drew it out of the water it was no longer a hook but a straight bar. The date of this episode was long before I made Scarren's acquaintance. I was informed upon unimpeachable authority that the original, actual hook of the adventure had been stolen many years previously by some practical joker. Scarren, however, said not a word of his loss, but next day he was seen, when telling the story to a stranger, to produce another and a larger straightened hook from his pocket for the purpose of illustrating his narrative. Shortly afterwards the second hook was stolen, but was replaced by yet a larger one. This process had been several times repeated, with the result that the alleged hook of the adventure grew until quite a startling size was

reached. The size to which Scarren's hook will have attained in, say, ten years, if Scarren lives so long, might be an interesting subject for speculation.

II

About a month before old Isaac's death a certain man whom I will call Chimer came to stay at the hotel. He had been sent as the representative of a firm of Port Elizabeth merchants to assist in winding up the affairs of a local trader who had come to financial grief. Chimer's room was next to mine; thus we got into the habit of finishing our evenings together.

Nearly every man has a fad, and this man's fad was spiritualism. He was a firm believer in ghosts and astral bodies, and the prophets of his cult were A. P. Sinnett and Madame Blavatski. He did his best to make a convert of me, but in spite of a close perusal of some very striking literature on the subject from the pens of men of splendid ability and great scientific attainments, I remained conscientiously unconvinced. Like the late George Augustus Sala, although I could conceive the possibility of the ghost of a man revisiting the scenes of his lifetime, I found it impossible to believe in the ghost of his garments, and who ever heard of an undraped apparition? The detailed account given by one eminent scientist as to how he was in the habit of materialising an attractive young female spirit named "Katie King," with whom he was on terms of strik-

ing intimacy, seemed not alone an insult to the human understanding but a melancholy instance of the weaknesses of the strong, of which history is full. Chimer was said to be a most successful medium, but he failed signally to produce any "manifestations" on the occasions when he attempted to convince me by means of demonstration. In discussing spiritualism he never used the first person singular, but always spoke of what "we" believe, what "we" have done, etc.

On the second evening after old Isaac's death I dined at the house of a friend; it was about half-past ten o'clock when I returned to the hotel. I was surprised to find the usual habitués of the billiard-room sitting in the dining-room. The only one who looked cheerful was Chimer; all the others appeared to be absolutely terror-stricken, their faces gleaming pallid under the sickly rays of a debilitated paraffin lamp. From time to time they glanced uneasily over their shuddering shoulders, and they all puffed with nervous fury at their respective pipes.

It was a queer collection of specimens of the genus Homo that I saw. There was Woods, who had not missed an evening in the billiard-room (excepting Sundays, when he invariably went to church) for many years. He was in the habit of beating his wife and starving his children; no one had the least idea as to what the source of his income was, but he always had money for liquor, for billiards and for putting in the plate. There was Shawe, champion liar of the town; he apparently lived on

Cape and tobacco-smoke, and he played a fair game of billiards except when sober. There was Loots, the Dutchman, who never drank at his own expense or played a game of billiards that there was the slightest chance of his losing. Dan Menzies, the Scotch tailor, who had all the instincts of a gentleman, as well as many of the potential elements of greatness, in spite of the fact of his being an almost hopeless sot. Brooke Crofton, who had been dismissed from his regiment during the Soudan campaign for disobedience of orders given during an action, or, as others put it, for cowardice. He was now, and had been for several years, trying to drink himself to death on an allowance made him for that purpose by his wife, who lived in England and had money of her own. Most of the others were young clerks and assistants in stores. Chimer looked up and caught my eye. In his there was a triumphant gleam.

The proprietor, whose face was the palest of the lot, soon revealed the gruesome cause of the terror which brooded over the gathering. A few hours previously they had all been sitting in the billiard-room, watching the course of a game, the first played on the table since the fixing of the new cloth and cushions, which had only been completed during the afternoon. On the top of a little cupboard which stood in the corner, and in which spare balls, chalk, sandpaper and other billiard requisites were kept, had been placed the mahogany triangle-frame which is used for fixing the balls in position in the game of pyramid pool. Lying in the triangle were the

fifteen pyramid balls. Woods and Crofton were the players. It was noticed that the lamps were in very bad trim and gave a most wretched light. (Shawe declared fervently that he had noticed a distinctly blue tinge in the flame; two of the clerks present corroborated this when appealed to).

All at once the triangle was seen to fly violently from the top of the cupboard, whilst the fifteen ivory balls crashed down on the floor and rolled with loud clatterings in different directions. The triangle-frame, out of which the balls had dropped, seemed as if propelled by an unseen power almost out of the window, close to which it, too, fell to the floor with an appalling noise. The effect on the spectators was terrific; Woods, Crofton and one of the clerks fainted dead away, and the others rushed from the room with wild yells.

As the moving incident was being related to me, Scarren, who happened not to have witnessed it, was engaged in quenching the lights and generally putting the room in order. The Fingo waiter was in unwilling attendance; for Scarren had, naturally enough, demurred at entering the room alone, and none of those who had been present when the fearsome occurrence took place would consent to accompany him.

After some very straight hints from the proprietor the haggard band departed in a body to see each other home. The last man was not to be envied.

III

Whilst on the way to my room for the purpose of retiring I noticed Chimer sitting on his bed. I entered his room. He was smoking his pipe, and his face wore a look of exultant satisfaction. I could hardly be surprised.

"Well?" said he.

"Well?" replied I.

"I should like to know how you account for what occurred to-night."

"At present I cannot account for it. Can you?"

"Yes, but I fear your prejudices would not allow of your admitting my explanation."

"You think, of course, that the spirit of old Isaac sent these balls rolling about the room."

"Certainly, I do."

"But if," said I, with the vain rashness of superior knowledge, "as you admit, a spirit gives neither chemical or dynamic evidence of its presence, how can it act physically upon inert bodies?"

"My dear fellow, as I have often told you, we do not for a moment pretend to be able to give an exhaustive explanation of phenomena of this class. We simply say that in incidents such as this, where what are called 'natural' causes are eliminated from the field of consideration by the fact of their absence, it is reasonable to fall back on what is called the 'supernatural.' As I have been careful to explain to you more than once, this may be a branch of the natural, and may be recognised some day as a legiti-

mate subject for scientific research by those who now treat us with derision."

"But are you justified in eliminating all possible natural causes in the present instance?"

"Certainly—you heard the account given; this was corroborated by all who were present. There was no one near the cupboard, the triangle was seen, in direct opposition to the law of gravitation, to fly through the air impelled by some force which could not, according to any scientific hypothesis, have had a natural origin."

"But, assuming the elimination of all natural possibilities—which is rather a large order—does it not seem shockingly inconsistent with all our ideas on the subject of death, which lends a certain dignity that we instinctively recognise even to the passing away of the life of a puppy, to believe that the spirits of a large number of men who, in essentials were very much the same in their lifetime as we are, have found nothing better to do in 'the vasty halls of death,' than to remain at the beck and call of a lot of (very often) silly persons and, when so bidden, to make tables dance, rap out unmeaning nonsense, or else to scare tipplers from a billiard-room by rolling balls about the floor."

"The world of the flesh is full of inconsistencies" my philosopher explained; "why not, therefore, the world of the spirits? What we think of that phase of the question is this, namely: that spirits on the lower planes—which are those concerned in so-called manifestations—are the ones which cannot sever themselves from the environment their bodies were

accustomed to. As there are different degrees of development among animals, of which man is the head, so there are among spirits. Thus some of the latter may be as the lower animals of the spirit-kingdom, and may indulge, as there is good reason for believing that they do, in spiritual monkey-tricks."

Knowing that Chimer and old Isaac had detested each other, I felt it would have been of no use my attempting the rehabilitation of the old man's ghost from the suspicion of being a spiritual monkey in the gloomy groves of Hades.

"Good-night, Chimer; I can only repeat the argument which Hume used against miracles. I do not think that Isaac had anything to do with to-night's scare."

And so, with the complacent dogmatism of the sceptic, I turned on my heel. The reader, no doubt, is of the opinion I expressed, but let him await the sequel.

Chimer nodded to me with an expression of pitying superiority. I went to bed and fell asleep almost immediately, for me a very unusual circumstance. I had a strange and vivid dream. I seemed to be wandering through a shadowy grove; all at once I saw a dejected-looking monkey which took great pains to conceal its face. It was sitting under a tree, to which its tail was tied. Moved by a sympathetic impulse, I approached and untied the knot; then I gently removed the paws from the downcast visage, with the view of offering consolation. The poor creature looked up diffidently and I recognised the features of Chimer.

After this I wandered on and on, until I found

myself on the verge of the smiling Elysian fields, which seemed to stretch away to infinity in fertile beauty. Under a tree which was laden with many-hued spherical fruit of about the size of billiard-balls, lay old Isaac, fast asleep, and with a smile of supreme peace upon his worn face. He was wrapped in the old billiard-cloth which I had caused to be placed in his coffin.

IV

Another month went past. In a few days my somewhat wearying stay at Hilston would draw to a close. Chimer had returned to Port Elizabeth, whence he had written to tell me of a remarkable manifestation which had taken place under his mediumship, in the course of which he had actually communicated with Isaac's spirit. Isaac said that he had caused the manifestation in the billiard-room, but that he did not mean to do the like again. After this, he had obstinately refused to answer any more questions. This, Chimer considered, proved that Isaac dead was more or less of the same disobliging nature as Isaac had been living—a strong collateral evidence of the genuineness of both his messages from the unseen. However, so far as manifestations were concerned, Isaac had hitherto kept his word, for the harmony of the billiard-room had not again been disturbed. The episode of the triangle and the scattered balls was almost forgotten, and the muddy trickle of belated life around the renovated table had long since resumed its normal course.

I had, all along, been keenly anxious to unravel the mystery of the locomotive triangle and the crashing balls, but hitherto all my efforts had been vain. I had from the beginning suspected Scarren of having had a hand in the business, and had over and over again attempted to draw him out on the subject. He, however, with much adroitness, had invariably turned the conversation to the topic of eel-fishing. However, the suspicion that Scarren could explain the matter if he only would, grew on me day by day, and I determined to make a desperate assault upon the citadel of his reserve before leaving Hilston. I had accidentally found out that whenever I fixed him with my eye, Scarren became very uneasy and endeavoured to escape. After this discovery I ceased to question him, but whenever I could manage to do so, I fixed him with a steady stare. Each successive time this happened he squirmed more and more until, at length, he got to avoiding me by means of the most obvious and awkward shifts.

At length—it was two days before my intended departure—I caught him alone in the billiard-room, where I had seen him enter with a paraffin can for the purpose of replenishing the lamps. I followed him, shut the door behind me, walked slowly to where he stood in the corner fumbling at a lamp with feverish and ostentatious activity, and stood behind him, relentless as Fate. First of all he pretended to be unaware of my presence, then he gave a hurried and startled glance over his shoulder.

"Scarren," said I, "you might as well own up. How did you manage it?"

He tried to bolt incontinently, but I got between him and the door.

"Don't be a fool," I said reassuringly. "I don't want to get you into a row; if you own up freely, I won't say a word to anyone."

"Well, sir, I'll have to tell you, but for God's sake don't give me away. It isn't that I am afraid of getting the sack—although that, of course, would ollow; but I've a reason for keeping it dark which you'd never guess, and which I can't tell you."

"Scarren," I rejoined with solemn severity, "you'll have to tell me *all* about it, mind that. I shall not stick to my promise if you keep a single word back. Speak up at once, or else look out."

He went quietly to the doorway and looked out to see that no one was listening. Then he carefully closed the door, after which he returned on tiptoe to the corner where I was standing with a stern visage but a triumphant heart.

"It was old Isaac, right enough"—

"Scarren," I exclaimed with indignation, "don't try that on with me."

"Wait a bit, sir, don't speak so loud. Let me tell you from the beginning, and then you'll understand. About half an hour before you came, on the day that Isaac died, I was sitting smoking at him, and all at once he seemed to get much better.

"'Scarren,' says he in quite a strong voice, 'I'll never hear the cock crow no more; I'll die before lock-up time.'

"'Why, Isaac,' says I, 'you look as if you was quite your own self again. I believe you'll be

singin' out the game again the day after to-morrow.'

"While we was talking we could hear the noise of the new cloth being nailed down. Isaac knew well enough what was going on and it made him angry.

"'No,' says he, quite raspy, 'I'll sing out no more games. Twenty years I've brushed her down, and they won't let me die before rippin' of her up.'

"Then he lay a long time silent, and I could see he was thinking hard about something. All at once he grips my hand—

"'Scarren,' says he, 'do you believe in ghosts?'

"First of all I was going to say no; then I thought that if I said so it might annoy him after he was dead, and he might come and show me I was mistaken.

"'Yes, Isaac,' says I; 'I've not seen any myself, but still I believes in them.'

"'All right,' says he; 'I'm going to give you my last dying will and testament by word of mouth, which you've got to carry out or be haunted by me whenever the Devil leaves the gate ajar for as much as five minutes.'

"'Well, Isaac,' says I, 'what is it that you want me to do?'

"'On the first night,' says he, 'when they plays on the new cloth and with them new cushions, which I know will be twice too strong for a table of her age, I want you to give them a fright and make them think that I've come back.'

"'Yes, Isaac, says I,' 'I'm quite willing to oblige, but how do you want me to do it?"

"'That I leave to you,' says he; 'there's lots of ways. You can let the rack fall down, or set the balls rolling about, or put gun-caps atop of the lamps. Only, mind this—you've got to make them jump, and think it's me that's done it; if you don't, I'll make you do the jumping.'

"Well, after Isaac was underground I set to thinking how I was to carry out his last will and testament, and I got fairly puzzled. There was lots of ways of making them jump, but I would be dead sure to be found out, and then, not alone would I lose my billet, but I'd always think that Isaac was not satisfied, and might come to tell me so, for Isaac was always a man of his word. Then I went to rummage in an old box of his, which he'd said I might have as a keepsake. I came across in it some fine brass wire, like what he'd used for mending cues that got their butts split. All at once an idea came, and I'm quite sure that Isaac put it into my head. So that evening, before I lit the lamps, I tied the one end of the wire, which was that fine you couldn't hardly see it, to the triangle which lay, full of balls, on the cupboard. The other end I passed along the wall and out through the window where the sash gapes; there I just whipped it round a nail. Then I lit the lamps and sat waiting for the room to fill up. When I thought there were enough in, I sneaked out, pretending that I was going to get my supper. After a bit I just gave the wire a tug, and then bolted round the corner."

Scarren's excitement had waxed during the narrative. From force of habit he had taken the straightened-out fish-hook from his pocket, and with it he had punctuated his sentences. I remained silent and lost in thought—marvelling at the fortitude of old Isaac and wishing I knew how to attain to a philosophy such as enabled its possessor to enjoy a prospective and post-mortem practical joke upon his death-bed.

"It was a regular three-star, double-barrelled eighteen-carat scare," said Scarren, after a pause—"and I know for as good a fact that old Isaac enjoyed it well."

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, on the same night I had such a curious dream. I saw Isaac, as plain as ever you like, sitting under a tree full of red and yeller apples. He was wrapped in the cloth we put in his coffin, and was laughing fit to split hisself."

I gave an involuntary start, for my dream of the same night flashed across my mind. After making the most solemn promises not to reveal the tale—except under certain improbable eventualities which, strangely enough, have since become actual—I bade farewell to old Scarren and walked away thinking, for the first time, that there might, after all, be something true in Chimer's creed.

CHICKEN WINGS

"A chiel's amang ye takin' notes,
And, faith, he'll prent it."—BURNS.

I

IT was by a mere coincidence that Raymond Benson and John Allister, who were both bound for Rossdale, met in the train running from Cape Town to the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony. Rossdale is a large mission institution situate in one of what are known as the Native Territories. It is liberally endowed by the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and has for its object the evangelisation and education of Bantu natives.

Benson, a Cape Colonist by birth, had obtained through the Cape Education Department the appointment of second teacher at the Institution; Allister had just arrived from Scotland, and had been selected by the Central Mission Board as book-keeper and general accountant. As he had acquired a fair amount of medical knowledge—he had, as a matter of fact, only been prevented by financial misfortune from finishing his courses at the University of Edinburgh and qualifying as a physician—he was also expected to practise the healing art among the residents at the Mission.

Benson possessed a good constitution and a keen

sense of humour. He was a clean-built man of middle height and dark complexion, with features of a slightly Jewish cast. His object in going to Rossdale was the acquirement of the Bantu language spoken in the vicinity. Moreover, he had no intention of staying more than a short time should the life there prove uncongenial.

Allister was a big, raw-boned Scotsman with a strong, clean-shaven face. His usual expression was extremely morbid, but now and then a very sweet smile would light up his rugged features. His speech had always a strong Scotch twang, and he occasionally —especially when excited—broke into the very broadest Doric.

Benson and Allister became very good friends during the course of the journey. From the railway terminus they travelled for a couple of days and nights in the post-cart, which delivered them at a village some twenty miles from their destination. At this village a trap from Rossdale, driven by a Kaffir who was quite ignorant of any but his mother-tongue, met them.

Allister, like Benson, had no missionary zeal. In fact he was absolutely without religious convictions of any kind, a circumstance which he had carefully concealed from the Mission Board. A weakness of the chest had rendered it highly advisable that he should leave Scotland for a year or two and seek some warmer clime. But his intention was to return to Scotland as soon as he should have saved enough money to admit of a continuance of his studies.

A fine autumn evening was drawing to its golden

close when the rickety cart bearing the two strangers descended the hillside at the foot of which Rossdale lay. The vehicle, far too light for its springs, had shaken the inmates cruelly; nevertheless they had been able to extract a good deal of enjoyment from the incidents of the journey. Their course lay through an undulating, grassy country thickly dotted over with little villages composed of beehive-shaped huts, among which numbers of naked children were playing. Every now and then they passed groups of men and women. The former had lost much of their picturesqueness owing to being dressed mainly in shoddy European clothing, but each carried at least one long, strong stick, and stalked along with a look of dignified disdain. The women were all draped in ochre-coloured blankets, fastened under the arm-pits and reaching to below the knee. But they held themselves erect and walked with a gait duchesses might have envied.

The Institution was an important one and employed a large staff. The Industrial Arts were important items in the curriculum. It lay more or less in the centre of a hollow about a mile in circumference. The buildings were massive and extensive. Around them lay a large plantation of blue-gum and oak trees, with here and there patches of orchard. On every side the landscape showed gently-swelling hills of inconspicuous height, thickly dotted with groups of huts. Herds of cattle browsed contentedly on the rich grass. The gracious autumn gloaming shed a soft radiance over the settlement. It looked like a spot consecrated to civilisation and peace—an

oasis in the desert of savagery. Benson drew a deep breath of satisfaction ; something seemed to whisper to him that life here might include compensations other than humorous ones. He communicated this thought to his companion, who, however, cynically replied to the effect that appearances were apt to be deceitful.

The vehicle drew up in front of the large central building, one wing of which was used as a dormitory for the boys, the other as quarters by most of the European staff. A neat-looking native servant-maid received the strangers and conducted them to their rooms upstairs. Soon afterwards, the ringing of a very discordant bell sounded through the premises. Benson and Allister then descended to the refectory, where, they had been informed, tea would be served.

Large tables were ranged across the room, and at these the native boys, each with a plate and a large tin mug before him, were seated. A small table in one of the corners was reserved for the Europeans ; at this Mr Duncan Mactavish, the boarding-master, Miss Mellish, the matron, and Miss Angus, the assistant matron, were seated. Benson and Allister, upon introducing themselves, were greeted with a reserve which, on the part of any but Scotch people, would hardly have been civil.

Mr Mactavish was a tall, dark, dour-looking man of about forty-five. Miss Mellish was stout, light-haired, pallid, and severe-looking. Miss Angus was a little, dark, withered-visaged woman ; she had a nervous habit of winking her eyes continually when spoken to or when speaking. When Miss Mellish

made a remark, as she seldom did, her mouth closed immediately afterwards with a kind of snap. Mr Mactavish being a bachelor, these ladies attended to the domestic arrangements of this branch of the Institution, under his supervision. They considered him a very great man indeed ; he considered them women of discrimination.

A hymn was sung, a prayer was said (extempore) and a very lengthy blessing invoked upon the food ; then all sat down to supper. The two strangers seemed to be looked upon with a certain amount of suspicion. Mr Mactavish applied himself with systematic diligence to the food and did not utter a word until his robust appetite had been assuaged. Benson and Allister were too hungry to mind the lack of conversation.

"I'm thinkin' it's a fine drive ye'll have had," said Mr Mactavish, after having subjected Allister to long and intent scrutiny.

"Middlin'," was the laconic response.

"Ye'll be new to yer wark, mebbe," resumed Mactavish, addressing Benson.

"Not quite," he replied ; "I have spent the last three years teaching in Cape Town."

"Ah, but that's anither thing ; ye'll have lots to learn o' oor methods here."

"I believe I came rather to teach than to learn," replied Benson, gently.

Three indignant pairs of eyes focussed themselves upon the speaker, who, however, looked blandly unconscious of giving offence. Mr Mactavish turned once more to Allister—

"Ye'll have some skill as a physeecian, I'm told."

"It depends upon what's wrang wi' ye," replied Allister, with imperturbability. "I can pull teeth fine, and I've learnt to shoe a horse."

This seemed to strike Mr Mactavish with momentary helplessness. However, after a pause, he returned to the attack—

"I suppose ye found the roads awfu'; that's ane o' the things we've to put up wi' here—havin' oor bones mashed when we travel. But a sense o' duty's a graund thing to gie ye patience."

Allister remained silent, so Benson replied—

"Yes, we got a bit bumped. The road is certainly not a credit to whoever is responsible for keeping it in order. That last drift, after you descend the hill beyond the trees, is a proper bone-shaker."

Mr Mactavish glared. He happened to be responsible for the state of this particular drift, and he looked upon certain repairs recently there effected as a triumph of engineering skill.

At the conclusion of supper, Mr Mactavish, with an attempt at geniality, invited the strangers to accompany him to the residence of the Principal of the Institution, the Rev. Mr Campbell. The visitors were ushered into a sitting-room which was furnished and decorated with exceedingly good taste. Mr Campbell was a widower, and childless. His niece, Jeanie, a girl of nineteen, kept house for him. Benson felt a certain mild curiosity as to what Jeanie Campbell was like. She had been described to him as being a remarkably pretty girl.

Mr Mactavish sat nervously on the edge of a chair which was slightly higher than the others and gazed intently at the closed door. Benson and Allister examined the engravings with which the walls were decorated. Suddenly and noiselessly the door opened and Jeanie entered with smiling face and outstretched hand.

"How do you do, Mr Mactavish—and you are Mr Benson, I'm sure. Oh, there is no need to introduce us. And Mr Allister, welcome to Rossdale. I knew you had both arrived, and was most anxious to see you. How good of you to come over at once."

Benson for once found the reality transcend the ideal he had formed. Jeanie was remarkably pretty. She had a beautiful figure, with nearly perfect hands and feet. Her eyes were steel-grey, bright with vitality and full of expression; her hair was dark, plentiful and wavy. As is usual in the case of South African girls, her colouring was somewhat wanting in tone, but her skin was smooth and clear and her lips red and tempting. Her mobile face seemed to be constantly changing its expression.

Mr Mactavish shifted his feet, cleared his throat and behaved generally like a nervous schoolboy. He more than once struggled to speak but found the effort beyond his strength. All this amused Benson and Allister vastly. It could be seen at a glance that the elderly boarding-master was in love with the girl, and Benson was fairly dazzled by the possibilities of amusement which the situation promised. He looked at Jeanie and happened to

intercept a lightning-like glance from her. She could see that Benson had rightly gauged the situation and a double flash of sympathetic electricity passed between them.

"I'm hopin', Miss Jeanie, that your tea-meetin' at the Girls' School was a successful one," said Mr Mactavish. This remark suggested, as it were, the mouse brought forth by the mountain, it was so utterly trivial as compared with the labour and trepidation which preceded it.

"Oh," answered Jeanie, lightly, "it was not either more or less dissipated than usual. Do you like tea-meetings, Mr Benson?"

"It depends, of course, upon who one meets and who pours out the tea. Don't you think so, Mr Mactavish?"

"Oor tea-meetin's have a purpose"; said Mr Mactavish, severely; "they are a feature in oor method o' educatin' and civilisin' the natives."

"In Scotland they're talkin' o' suppressin' tea-meetin's by statute," said Allister, with a look at Jeanie, "they gie such occasions for ungodly gossip amang the weemen."

"Oor tea's flavoured wi' the sugar o' Christian charity and the milk o' human kindness," retorted Mr Mactavish, sternly.

Just then the door again opened and Mr Campbell, the Principal, entered. He was a big, red-bearded man with bushy eyebrows. Jeanie very prettily introduced the strangers to him, and he soon was deep in conversation with Allister, who knew several of his friends in Scotland.

Benson crossed the room and took a low seat close to Jeanie. Mr Mactavish evidently regarded this proceeding with disapproval, for he turned his chair slightly, so as to get the girl and her companion out of the range of his vision, and took an apparently absorbing interest in the conversation of the others.

"You are a Colonist, are you not?" asked the girl.

"Yes," replied Benson, "I hope you don't object."

"Object? I should think not. Good gracious! If they had sent two more Scotsmen here I should have run away and become an hospital nurse or a"—

"Were you going to say 'barmaid'?" asked Benson, sinking his voice.

"How—how did you know?" gasped the girl.

"Sympathetic intuition, I suppose. But why do you object to Scotsmen? I thought you were Scotch yourself."

"Mr Benson, if you ever dare to say such a thing again, we shall quarrel. Because you were born in South Africa are you a Hottentot? I happened to be born in Scotland, but you can hardly blame me for a thing that happened when I was so very young; I was only a year old when I came away. No, I am a Cape Colonist; I have breathed Cape air and eaten Cape food ever since I was a baby. In fact, I'm just Cape from head to foot."

"I'm very glad to be able to sympathise with you, for I happen to be very fond of the Cape myself, but just now will you satisfy a perhaps im-

pertinent curiosity by telling me why you object so much to Scotch people?"

"You will know, without being told, before you have been here many months. One does not object to leg of mutton, or even pumpkin on the table now and then. But suppose you were to be fed, say, on pumpkin for breakfast, dinner and supper, including entrées and dessert, every day for several years, you'd long for a change of diet, would you not?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Scotch people are very good indeed, 'unco' guid' in fact—and no one would dispute the fact did they not carry inscriptions of their virtues printed all over them in large letters. And then—the way they run down everything South African. What puzzles me is, why they ever left their own superior country. I'm sure we could manage our own affairs well enough without them."

"Well, for my part," replied Benson, "I have liked most of the Scotch people I have met. I must, at the same time, own it to be evident that when the individual prayed 'Lord, gi'e us a guid conceit o' oorsels,' not alone must the prayer have been literally granted, but it must have been put up on behalf of the whole nation."

On the way homeward Benson tried to draw Mr Mactavish into conversation, but without success. Allister was unwontedly silent. He had, as he said, been "takin' notes."

As a matter of fact, the boarding-master was not at all pleased at the evident pleasure Jeanie had shown in Benson's society. Mr Mactavish was badly

in love; he scented untoward complications. For a long time he had been hovering on the brink of a proposal, and, although Jeanie had never given him the least encouragement, his "guid conceit" made him as sanguine of acceptance as ever was the Laird o' Cockpen.

Mr Mactavish was the senior member of the Institution staff—so far as length of service went. He had seen Principals come and Principals go, but since the birth of the Institution there had been but one boarding-master, and his name was Mactavish. Consequently, he had come to regard the fortunes of the establishment as being bound up with his own personality. As a matter of fact none of the various Principals had ever properly asserted himself; each had tacitly acquiesced in the dour boarding-master's assumption that he was the pivot upon which the whole organisation revolved.

He now determined upon making both Benson and Allister feel the full weight of his authority. Benson he would tackle first.

"Ye'll begin your wark i' the mornin'," said he to Benson as they separated for the night.

"Oh, we'll see. Perhaps I'll take a day off and look around the place before putting on the collar."

"We're no idlers here; you'll hae plenty o' time to look around after school hours."

Benson had to bite his lip to prevent himself from telling Mr Mactavish with emphasis to mind his own business. But he was not an ill-natured fellow, and, having gauged the boarding-master's

feelings towards Jeanie correctly, had no difficulty in ascribing this churlishness to its true source.

After all, Benson took over his class next day. The teacher whose place he was taking was anxious to leave at once, and could only do so on condition of Benson's foregoing his "day off." Mr Mactavish quite mistakenly took the circumstance as indicating submission to his authority.

The class numbered some forty boys, their ages ranging between eleven and fifteen years. Benson was agreeably surprised at the tone of the school. The lads were fairly intelligent, and discipline had been well kept up. But he noticed that the names, rather than the sense of things taught, were retained, that memory was quite out of proportion to understanding. However, the boys were evidently anxious to learn, and the schoolroom was lofty, commodious and well lighted. Benson felt as though he were going to enjoy his work.

At noon he went over to his room; he met Allister on the way.

"I've been takin' a walk round," said the latter, "and have had a long talk wi' Maclean, the carpenter. He's just burstin' wi' gall an' general information. Losh! but doesn't he hate Mactavish."

"Well, let me have some information without the gall. I want to know as much as possible about these people."

"Man, but we'll have lots o' fun. It appears that Mactavish is in love wi' young Jeanie, and both Miss Mellish and Miss Angus are in love with Mactavish. But these are trifles. The main thing is

that the place has been groanin' under Mactavish's tyranny for ever so long; all is ripe for a revolution. Losh! but it's a Christian community."

"Well," replied Benson, "I, for one, will not join in any revolution. I have my own work to do; I'll take care no one interferes with that. But I mean to lead a quiet life if they will let me."

"I'm thinkin' ye'll have to tak' sides. 'Whoso is not wi' us is against us' is a very philosophical text. Are ye goin' to fish?"

"Fish? Rather; it's my favourite sport. But where? I've not heard of any river about here."

"I was meanin' in the Apostolic sense—'fishers o' men,' you know."

"Oh, that's quite out of my line. I'm a pedagogue, not a missionary."

"Well, ye'll have to cast a line at the prayer-meetin' here. If ye don't, Mactavish 'll gie ye drumsticks. It appears they have fowls for dinner five days a week regularly—sometimes oftener. It's the rule that if ye don't fish ye'll never get a wing, but if ye cast a good long line wi' a takin' text for bait, not alone will ye get a wing, but sometimes a piece of liver as well."

"Oh, nonsense; the carpenter has been pulling your leg."

"All right; just wait an' ye'll see."

Just then the dinner-bell sounded, and the two friends descended to the refectory together. The only meat on the table was a pair of boiled fowls. Mr Mactavish, with great deliberation and a skill

born of long practice, dismembered them. Then he paused as though to rest after his exertions.

"Ye'll be comin' to oor prayer-meetin' this evenin'?" he said, addressing Benson.

"I don't know that I shall."

"But we've counted on a discoorse from ye, and I've told Mr Campbell that ye'll tak' your turn to-night."

"Very good of you, I'm sure," replied Benson, nettled, "but I know what I've engaged to do, and holding prayer-meetings is not included. You had no authority to tell Mr Campbell anything of the kind."

"Well, Mr Allister, we'll just have to ca' your services into requisition."

"Ye'll find me in the office frae nine till five every day. Outside that time I'll do no wark, unless ye want me to pull a tooth or compound a pouder. In these cases I'll oblige at any hour of the four-an'-twenty."

Mr Mactavish uttered, with alarming intonation, a sound which cannot be expressed by the whole twenty-six-fold force of the alphabet, but which used to be expressed as "humph!" Then he proceeded to divide the members of the fowls. One of these had been rather more debilitated than the other. The inferior drumsticks were, after the ladies had been helped, duly apportioned to Benson and Allister, respectively. Benson looked up and caught Allister's eye which was bent on him with great gravity. Then his sense of humour overcame the schoolmaster and he fell into an absolutely uncontrollable fit of laughter.

All proceedings stopped. Miss Mellish glared

indignantly at the delinquent; Miss Angus gasped and winked her eyes with hysterical vigour. Allister's face expressed nothing but sombre surprise; the boarding-master turned purple with inarticulate fury. The contagion of Benson's laughter spread to the boys; within a few seconds the forms rocked with mirth. Then Mr Mactavish leaped up, seized the smallest boy on the nearest form and dragged him out of the room. Benson, who had regained command of himself under stress of the tragic situation, noticed that the ejected boy had given little or no cause for complaint.

Dinner over, Benson went to his room, threw himself on the bed, and laughed so violently that the room shook. Allister came in, lit his pipe, and regarded his distressed friend with inscrutable gravity.

"Well," he said, "was I not right?"

"Oh yes," replied Benson, between paroxysms, "but I think I'll roll under the table and die if such a thing happens again."

"I don't despair o' oor gettin' wings, and even an occasional liver, although we don't fish," said Allister, after a contemplative pause.

"Leg, wing or liver, for mercy's sake don't look at me again as you did to-day. I hate putting myself in the wrong, and my performance was very discreditable."

"An interestin' fact I ascertained from Maclean was that Mactavish suffers from severe gout periodically, and that the malady only yields to treatment wi' colchicum," said Allister, with a suspiciously innocent expression.

II

Next day Benson and Allister received a note apiece from Jeanie, asking them to come over to the Girls' School in the afternoon and take tea.

On arrival they were ushered into a prim little parlour. This soon became filled to overflowing with guests. Here they met, for the first time, Mr Drew, the senior teacher of the theology section, and his wife. Mr Drew was short, stout, dark and wide-awake-looking. He appeared to be under the influence of his wife, who was evidently much older than he. She was a woman of large frame, with hollow cheeks and light-red hair. Her face and eyes were pale; her voice suggested pulmonary delicacy.

The three ladies having charge of the female department of the Institution acted jointly as hostesses. Miss Meiklejohn, the eldest, was a tall, angular Scotswoman with a strong, intellectual face. She spoke with measured deliberation and was evidently unaccustomed to having her authority questioned. Miss Struben was short and exceedingly stout. She had a depressed and disappointed look, and whenever she made a remark, glanced apprehensively at Miss Meiklejohn to see how it would be taken. These two had been for many years members of the Institution staff; they regarded Mr Mactavish with the utmost reverence. Apart from their work they had one object only in life, and that was to see a match between the boarding-master and Miss Mellish. They had noted and deplored the Great Man's weak-

ness for Jeanie. However, as they looked upon this untoward circumstance as due to her siren wiles, they regarded the aberration with pity rather than blame.

Miss Robertson, the junior teacher, had only recently been imported from Scotland. A comely girl with rosy cheeks, bright brown eyes and a generous figure, she gave one the idea that she longed for a different life and that she felt as irksome the perpetually revolving treadmill of ultra propriety that Fate compelled her to climb. In fact she struck Benson as having a healthy spice of the World, the Flesh and the Devil under her coil of abundant hair.

Jeanie was the only one of the ladies who appeared to be at ease ; she laughed and chatted gaily, while the others only interjected formal remarks now and then. Allister felt drawn towards little Miss Robertson ; the suppressed vitality in her brown eyes aroused his interest and sympathy. With some difficulty he made his way across the crowded room to where she was sitting.

"You and I are among the latest arrivals, I believe," he said pleasantly.

"So we are, but I have been through my ordeal, so am only a spectator to-day."

"Might one ask what you mean?"

"Don't you know that this is a state function, got up to welcome you and Mr Benson?"

"Indeed I did not. Oh, the guilefulness of women!—and Miss Jeanie called it a simple tea-party."

"Well, you had better begin preparing your

speech. I had to make one. Mind and be careful to make a good first impression."

Just then the ominous sound of Mr Mactavish clearing his throat was heard, and an apprehensive silence fell upon the assemblage. Jeanie looked at Benson with unutterable mischief in her eyes. Then the voice of the boarding-master began in measured, lugubrious tones—

"Leddies and gentlemen,—fellow-warkers i' the vineyard, we have met to-day to welcome two who have just put hands to the plough which runs in oor furrows o' grace. One o' them comes frae the land we left—most o' us many years ago—to dwell in this clime o' savagery and spend oor lives in reclaimin' the heathen frae his barbarism. We know what we have done in the past; we know how hard oor labour was at first; but we must be thankful that strength was given tae enable us tae break the hard, virgin sod, and thus make the wark lighter for those who come after.

"We will humbly trust that oor friends will duly appreciate the enorrmous responsibilities restin' upon them as missioners, an' that they will assist in keepin' this little community what it is—'a light tae lighten the Gentiles,' and a continual example tae the heathen o' the true Christian life.

"One o' the things we most firrmly endeavour tae cultivate is a true earnestness o' purpose in a' branches o' oor wark, and the consequent avoidance o' freevolity o' a' sorts. Oor little warld has its laws and salutary customs, and tae these a' must conforrm. As to what these are, I, as senior member o' the

Institution staff, will be glad to gie information. Mr Allister and Mr Benson, in the unavoidable absence o' oor respected Principal, I bid ye a hearty welcome."

Allister flatly refused to respond, so Benson arose and made a few appropriate remarks. Soon afterwards the meeting broke up. Jeanie and Benson met at the door and walked on together.

"Are you not ashamed of yourself?" he asked, "for getting us down to that function under false pretences."

"I am, rather; but I knew that if Mr Allister had had any inkling as to what was going to happen, he would not have come. But all my dissimulation was thrown away, for he did not make a speech after all. But do tell me what you think of us?"

"Well, my dominant feeling is one of hopeless inability to live up to your ideals. You see, I am not in any way cut out for a missionary. Moreover, I could not conscientiously recommend any self-respecting Gentile to light his candle at my lamp."

"Oh, so far as that goes, Mr Mactavish's lamp is so overflowing with oil, and shines so vividly that we might all quench ours without putting the Gentile public to any inconvenience. But I am keen on hearing original impressions; do oblige by telling yours."

"It is quite clear you have not even guessed at the magnitude of my limitations. Nothing, as a rule, strikes my imagination unless it be funny. And I have not yet got sufficient 'atmosphere,' as the artists say, to enable me to appreciate properly

the local humour. Truly, the pursuit of the humorous is my only serious occupation."

"You are a disappointing man. Now, I am as fond of running other people's impressions to earth as you are of hunting jokes. You must have acquired some impressions; do communicate them."

"Well, the thing which strikes me as most remarkable about these people is the utter absence of anything like friendliness towards each other, or, in fact, towards anyone."

"Ah, but when you have been here as long as I, you will look upon this afternoon as an oasis in a desert of unfriendly days. Why, most of these people hardly speak to each other when they meet, unless it be at a function such as this. There is, of course, one exception; outside the church on Sunday morning they all shake hands and smile sweetly. But from Monday to Saturday, when not at work, they glower and spend all their time brooding over imaginary slights and each other's shortcomings."

"But, under such conditions, how on earth does the place hold together. What is the cement?"

"That was a great puzzle to me at first; however, now that I have become accustomed to the place, all seems natural enough. The fact is, these people cannot be judged by the standard of any others. Most of them have risen from a much lower social plane and in the rising have acquired an exaggerated idea of their own individual importance. Each one is continually polishing up his dignity as though it were a little tin plate and resenting imaginary specks of rust. Then they all run in so

many small grooves, and each groove appears to the one who runs in it to be the most important one in the world. The curious thing is that they are all conscientiously devoted to the missionary cause. They certainly do their work well."

"I suppose they all think they are Christians in the fullest sense of the term?"

"Rather!—well, you heard Mr Mactavish to-day. But you ought to hear them at the prayer-meetings. And many of them know their Bibles nearly by heart. It is all very curious. I used to talk to uncle about these things, but he got angry. I once suggested, after a very bad general quarrel, that he should make them all come to our house and there kiss and make friends."

"Surely, Mr Mactavish fell in with that proposal?"

"I said I made the suggestion to my uncle, not to Mr Mactavish."

"Well, if you want to give the plan a chance of success, propose it next time to Mr Mactavish."

"Well, since you are so interested, I make you a present of the notion. Of course, I do not come into the scheme; I have fallen out with no one. You might point out that they would only be following the example of the early Christians."

"The pioneers of a new evangel should always practise what they preach."

"Very well, you be the pioneer. You can preach to Mr Mactavish and practise on Miss Mellish and Miss Angus. But I must now go in. I hope we will have many more long talks. Lest you should

become conceited, I will tell you that the great dread of my life is lest I should acquire a Scotch accent, so I value your speech highly as a corrective."

"It has become available only just in time. I would not, for the world, say that your accent is Scotch, but you must excuse my saying that now and then there is just a little suggestion of, one might say, finely-ground oatmeal, in your otherwise irreproachable speech. Yes, I think you cannot do better than cultivate my acquaintance as much as possible."

Jeanie, after flashing a look of indignation at Benson, darted into the house.

III

Life at the Institution was void of all but the most trivial incident. Miss Mellish began to thaw slightly towards Benson. This was soon attributed by the astute Allister to its true cause: gratitude to the schoolmaster for having attracted Jeanie. Miss Mellish was, of course, fully persuaded that the latter was a designing minx, who had deliberately set her cap at Mr Mactavish. He was no longer actively aggressive, but had remained implacable in so far as the drumstick question was concerned. Two months after their arrival neither Benson nor Allister had tasted wing, breast or liver of the many birds at whose autopsies they had been present. Benson often joined Jeanie in her walks, for the purpose, as he said, of safeguarding the purity of her accent.

At length the day arrived when Mr Mactavish's place at the dinner-table was vacant. He was reported as being very ill with gout. A messenger was sent with speed to the Residency for Dr Jenkin, the District Surgeon, but that practitioner was found to be suffering from incipient delirium tremens. Then Allister was called in.

That evening Allister came to Benson's room, where he sat down and gravely lit his pipe.

"Well, how is Mr Mactavish?" asked Benson.

"His physical malady is subsidin' but I fear his mental condition is no that o' a professin' Christian."

"Well, I'm glad the old chap is better. I've always heard that gout affected the temper."

"It does, awfully. Ye'll be glad to hear that the chicken question has been satisfactorily settled."

"What do you mean?"

"I may as well begin at the beginnin' and tell ye all about it. Of course, you know Mactavish did not send for me until he'd found out that Jenkin was so fou' he didn't know colchicum from prussic acid. Well, I went to see the old man. He was sittin' wi' his left fut wrapped up and restin' on a chair, lookin', well, if he'd only had twa horns and a tail Auld Nick wud have just capered wi' envy."

"'I'm concerned to see ye sae oot o' sorts, Mr Mactavish,' said I, seempathetically.

"'Ah, mon,' says he, 'I feel like Dauvid in the fowerty-ninth Psalm when I think o' that swillin' swine of a Jenkin. I didna want to trouble ye,

Mr Allister, knowin' how hard ye work, but I juist had to Hae ye brocht the colchicum wi' ye?'

"'Wark never stands in the way o' my helpin' a sufferin' fellow-creature,' said I, 'and I can seempathise wi' ye fine just now, for I'm in a bad way myself. The wame o' me's just tied into knots wi' the indigestion.' Here I gied a groan.

"'Hoots, mon,' says he wi' a screech, 'indigestion's nae mair to be compared wi' gout than a midge is wi' a mad dog. Gie me the colchicum.'

"'Mr Mactavish,' said I, 'ye've evidently no idea how I suffer. Not alone is my wame tied into knots, but sufferin' has seriously affected my memory. Will ye believe me when I tell ye that I cannot for the life o' me remember where I put the jar o' colchicum?'

"With that he sat straight up and stared at me for a bit; then he fell back wi' a squeal, for a twinge just made him feel as if his big toe were bein' twisted off.

"'I'm no sure', said I, after a while, 'but that if I could see some prospect o' my indigestion gettin' better, I might concentrate my mind sufficiently to remember where the colchicum is.'

"'What do ye mean?" he asked.

"'Mr Mactavish," said I most impressively, 'when Peter saw the sheet descendin' wi' a' the beasts an' birds in it—well, I'd stake every scruple o' colchicum I ever saw that every fowl had twa wings and a liver; but since I've been eatin' at your table not a wing o' the many chickens ye ha' carved has ever fluttered either to me or to Benson, and although

ye've helped me to many a gizzard, ye've never given me a liver, even by mistake. It's the lang, weary course o' femoral muscle that is underminin' my constitution. For many, many weeks those drumsticks ye're so generous of, have been beatin' the Deil's tattoo on my sufferin' ribs."

"He lay for a long time wi' his eyes closed. Then he said, quite humbly—

"'Mr Allister, ye're a hard mon;—but gin ye let bygones be bygones, I'll help ye to the liver wing o' every fowl I carve for the next ten years.'

"'A wing each to Benson and me when there's two chickens on the table, and one liver in three between us. These are the conditions, Mr Mactavish.'

"'It's my duty to submit when despitefully used,' he replied; 'gi'e me the colchicum.'

"Wi' that my memory came back quite suddenly, and I remembered that the colchicum was in my pocket. I gave him a liberal dose."

. . . . . .

Two days later Mr Mactavish reappeared at table. The principal item of the banquet was, as usual, a pair of boiled chickens. The boarding-master was better than his word. Benson and Allister each got a liver wing. After a pause of indecision the carver helped Miss Mellish to one and Miss Angus to the other of the remaining wings. Then, with a sigh, and the mien of a suffering saint, he placed a drumstick upon his own plate.

He ate his dinner with an expression of proud resignation suggestive of Pope Alexander VI. washing

the feet of the poor. Benson nearly repeated his former reprehensible conduct; he managed, however, to avoid disgracing himself, but narrowly escaped apoplexy in the process.

Next Sunday, Mr Campbell happening to be absent on clerical duty, Mr Mactavish held service in his place. As an extra lesson he read the 22nd Psalm. When he reached the text "they gaped at me with their mouths as a raving and a roaring lion," he looked straight at Benson and Allister, who were sitting together.

It only remains to be recorded that Mr Mactavish adhered with strictness to the terms of the compact into which he was forced by the guileful Allister.

AFAR IN THE DESERT

THIS is the story of a boy and a girl who met in a South African wilderness under strange circumstances more than thirty years ago. The girl was desert-bred ; her feet had never trodden those paths of convention which, in the aggregate, are called civilisation. A chance medley of unusual happenings drove the boy forth from the haunts of men, but the absorbing spell of the wild fell upon him, and to him the "call of the wild" was ever afterwards an imperative command.

It is a love-story ; but Love revealed the shining wonder of his face to these two for less than one fleeting day, the while Death hid close behind him.

Some of that which is here related is true.

I

THE boy went down to the lower camp from his lonely tent, that was pitched on one of the terraces near the head of the Pilgrim's Rest Valley, for the purpose of buying his meagre supplies for the following week, for it was Saturday afternoon. Night was falling when he started homeward, and it was dark when he reached Slater's Claim and the Big Rock. Just there he stumbled over a man who was

lying, sleeping the sleep of intoxication, across the path.

"The Boy"—he was known from one end of the creek to the other by that designation—struck a match and examined the man's face. He recognised it at once as being that of Dan the Reefer, a gigantic yellow-bearded Californian—the camp's most celebrated prospector. Next to the sleeper lay a new blanket tied up in a neat bundle.

A cold wind was searching down from the frost-dusted peaks which stood, lofty and clean-cut, against the early winter's sky; so the boy untied the bundle, and, after placing the head of the man in a comfortable position, spread the blanket over him and tucked it in. In doing this his hand touched a leather pouch. After considering the risk he was running, the boy opened the pouch and found that it contained about ten ounces of gold in a chamois leather bag. He transferred the bag to his pocket and went home.

Next morning the boy went down to the Reefer's tent and handed over what he had taken charge of. The Reefer was profanely thankful.

"I'll do you a good turn for this," said he, "—— me if I don't."

"Take me out prospecting with you," said the boy at a venture.

"Can you hold a rifle straight?"

"Yes; but I haven't got one."

"Oh, that's all right; I have. You'll kill meat and I'll strike a reef that'll make our fortunes."

Here was a piece of luck; the very thing he had

longed for hopelessly was thrust upon him. To go prospecting with the Reefer was an honour sought by many.

"Let's see," said the Reefer, "this is Sunday; sleep here Wednesday night and we'll start Thursday."

So the boy packed up his few belongings, stored them in the tent of a friend, and put in an appearance at the Reefer's tent at the appointed time. The Reefer was not at home, but he turned up, more or less drunk, in the middle of the night.

All preparations had been made; a month's "tucker" for two had been provided. This included flour, tea, a little sugar and salt, and a few simple remedies for use in the event of sickness. The goods were scientifically packed in two "swags"—that of the Reefer weighing about ninety pounds and that of the boy about thirty. The Reefer carried a pick, a shovel and a pan, in which the limits of combined efficiency and lightness had been reached; the boy a lifting-block, Westley-Richards rifle and a hundred cartridges. Each took, besides, a water-bottle, a cooking "billy," a blanket, a spare flannel shirt and two pairs of thick woollen socks.

Their course led down the valley of the Blyde River, through the loveliest imaginable scenery. Down and down the valley seemed to sink among the convoluted mountains that are so rich in forest, crag and sounding waterfall. After crossing a divide the deserted site of the village of Ohrigstad was passed. Here was the scene of a tragedy. The township had flourished, the land was fertile, the surrounding

a hunters' paradise. All went well for a time; then came fever; within a few weeks all the settlers went down. The majority died; the survivors were rescued and removed to a healthier locality, where they founded the town of Lydenburg. In blue-books published years afterwards, the abandonment of Ohrigstad was erroneously attributed to fear of the Bapedi—natives located in a neighbouring mountain range.

The Reefer was a silent man, who was obsessed by one idea—the finding of gold where none had previously been found. The one and only thing which gave him pleasure was to make a "strike." But the discovery once declared and made the object of a "rush," the thing immediately lost its charm. Then he would sell out, usually for far less than the value of his claim, and once more follow the rainbow. This man's life had literally been spent on the prospecting trail. He had made several rich strikes of gold, not alone in Africa, but in America—North and South. In those days the Klondyke was unknown, but the Reefer had trailed to what he called "the head waters of the Arctic," and had found rich gold in the Yukon district, from which he was driven back by the pitiless cold. He knew every creek and placer in the alluvial fields of California.

The boy was nineteen years of age, but did not look it. He was lithe, small-boned and tall, with fair hair, blue eyes and a face that gained him the good graces of some women. Thrown on the world when quite a child, he had known phases of sin and suffering not usually experienced by the young. It was a

strain of idealism and an inherent passionate love of nature that enabled him to save his soul alive. In his ear the voice of the wilderness was ever sounding. Whenever he managed to save enough money to buy sufficient supplies, he would wander away into the vague, unknown country lying east and north of the fields, in search of gold, hunting and adventure. The first he never found.

Down and down still sank the valley towards its junction with the Olifant—studded throughout its enchanting length with dark green patches of virgin forest, strung like emeralds upon the chain of a crystal stream. The summer rains had been heavy, so every ravine cleaving the hills on either side was vocal with impetuous water. The wild creatures gazed at them from the high ledges or crashed unseen through the underwood at their approach. The chanting call of the brown falcons wheeling among the crags sounded like a trumpet bidding them go forward into the unknown, where dwelt fortune and romance.

They camped each night under trees centuries old. How the leaping flames lit up the groined boughs spreading from hoar-ancient trunks, revealing depths of mysterious shadow in the greenery! When the flames died down, how the restful darkness closed in, full of rich suggestion! These nights were so full of rapture that the boy could hardly sleep: it seemed a sin to waste such hours in unconsciousness. Often the dawn would find him watching and praying with that best kind of prayer—the uplifting of the heart to the plane of nature's most exalted harmonies. Then he would sink into an hour's dreamless slumber, to be

awakened by a shove from the Reefer's friendly foot, and to find a steaming pannikin of tea ready at the side of his couch.

II

The sound of a violin in one of the gorges of the Olifant's River valley seemed very incongruous indeed. The source of the music was hidden behind some large trees. Beyond these stood a tent-wagon. On the box sat a tall, dark, bearded man plying the bow industriously, the music being a reel played in very quick time. His clothing was of brayed skin; his muscular arms were bare to the elbow. An immense lion-skin lay drying, the fleshy side being uppermost, upon the "tent" of the wagon. The black hair of the mane was protruding over the back of the tent, and the tufted tail dangled close to the face of the musician. At the side of the wagon was a small "lean-to" of coarse calico. Meat, in various stages of the process of drying, hung festooned among the trees.

The musician laid down his instrument, leaped lightly from the wagon and advanced with outstretched hand.

"Welcome, welcome," he said, speaking in Dutch; "put down your bundles and rest. Look what your uncle has shot." Here he pointed to the lion-skin. "You fellows are after gold, I suppose; but what has a hunter to do with gold? Come and drink coffee. Anna, is there any coffee ready?"

The concluding words were addressed to a girl

who, followed shyly by a small boy, emerged from the lean-to and silently shook hands with the strangers. She appeared to be about eighteen years old. Her oval, slightly freckled face had beauty of a distinctive type. Her eyes were dark and had an expression of sadness. Health glowed through and enriched her skin. But the glory of this girl was her hair ; its wealth of bronzed auburn, thick and waved, was full of changing lights. She was dressed partly in male attire.

Somehow this did not seem incongruous to the boy. He was by disposition unconventional to a degree. His eyes appraised the girl admiringly ; the shapely figure was almost too sturdy for grace, but it had the strength his lacked. Nature, who always schemes for the mating of contrasts, made these two goodly and desirable in each other's eyes.

The boy's appraising glances followed the girl as she went to the tail-board of the wagon and busied herself with the coffee arrangements. The play of her strong, full arm was good to watch ; the inartistic *veldschoen* could not hide the symmetry of her feet. A loose, blouse-like garment of linen permitted glimpses of a neck strong and fine, and dazzlingly white below the area of sunburn.

The coffee was a pleasant variant from tea—the prospector's only prepared beverage. They sat on the sward and talked. The Reefer had no Dutch, so the boy acted as interpreter. The owner of the wagon was a Boer named Dirk Fourie. He had a farm in the Lydenburg district, but spent most of his time in the hunting-field. Fourie was a widower

with three children. Accompanied by these and an old Hottentot he had undertaken this trip, intending to reach the low country in the vicinity of the nether reaches of the Letaba River. But he found that the rains had there fallen late, so, dreading fever, decided to remain for a time in the valley of the Olifant. To avoid risk of "bush-sickness" he had sent the oxen back to the farm in charge of his elder son and the Hottentot, with orders that they were to be brought back after six weeks had passed.

Fourie's manner was characterised by a kind of yearning friendliness; the advent of the strangers seemed to afford him very sincere pleasure. He neither knew nor cared anything about gold, so the Reefer soon found the conversation irksome and wandered off to examine the formation. The boy just then cared for nothing so much as hunting, so he and Fourie sat and discussed game and the slaying thereof. The lion-skin was pulled down and admired. A graphic account of the downfall of the great marauder was given. It appeared that Fourie's father had been killed by a lion, so the Boer carried on a lifelong vendetta against the whole lion species. The death had been amply revenged, for twenty-two of these animals had fallen to the long-barrelled *roer* which hung in the wagon, and nine to a more modern rifle—a Westley-Richards musket—just then standing against the wheel.

Fourie went back to his violin. His repertoire seemed to consist solely of reels, all of the very liveliest kind. The boy and the girl gravitated towards each other. But conversation was difficult;

they were full of embarrassment. They wandered together for a short distance along the hillside. He told her of his life on the gold and diamond fields and of those far-off towns she had heard rumours of. The ocean and the great ships were to her the most wonderful of all things. Had such not been mentioned in the Bible, she would not have believed their existence possible. She had been taught to read, but the Bible was her only book. With her large, lustrous eyes fixed on the boy's face she listened, gravely interested, to all he told her.

Of herself and her experiences the girl could hardly be induced to say a word. Her ignorance of the world beyond the farm and the scenes of her father's different hunting trips was almost fathomless. They returned to the wagon, and soon afterwards the Reefer arrived, carrying a haversack full of quartz.

"I think we'll stay and see what's to be found about here," he said.

Next morning the Reefer disappeared on his endless quest of the rainbow. Fourie and the boy went for a tramp after game. The somewhat vague and unpractical mien of the Boer disappeared when on the hunting spoor ; he became cool, alert and capable. The lore of the wilderness was to him as an open book. The boy had somewhat prided himself on his skill as a hunter, but he soon saw that compared with Fourie he was the merest novice. Signs and tokens invisible to him before were pointed out and deduced from unerringly. Fourie was generous, giving his companion opportunity after opportunity to lay low koo-

doo, sable and tsessabi. The spoil was handed over to the "Balala"—"the people who are dead"—wretched outlaws or waifs of annihilated clans, who wandered, weaponless and without clothing, over the veldt. As a rule they lived on roots, grubs, snakes and other unspeakable things. Like wine-flies when one opens a bottle of wine, the Balala would suddenly materialise from the void whenever meat was in evidence. They would be given the bulk of the carcase for their own use, and told to convey the choicer portions, with the skin, to the camp. This they never failed honestly to do.

The abject submissiveness of these people was pathetic in the extreme; it must have been the result of a terrible course of hopeless suffering. They never spoke unless first addressed; then they answered in low-toned monosyllables. A weird deftness and intelligence characterised all they did. At the camp they would silently set down whatever had been given into their charge, and as silently vanish. As an instance of their honesty it may be mentioned that once, when the boy lost his hunting-knife, it was found by the Balala and returned to him. It was sticking in the ground, close to his head, when he awoke one morning. And what a priceless possession the implement would have been to the finder!

Evidences of a once-teeming human population abounded over the whole countryside, which was covered with groups of low, circular stone walls, indicating where thousands of kraals once stood. But the exterminating raids of Tshaka had swept it bare. Now its only human dwellers were a few creatures so

wretched and so reduced that the very beasts of prey were said to despise them.

Thus passed many halcyon days. The boy had now become almost a member of the little family to whose hearth in the wilderness he had drifted through so strange a chance. The Reefer was hardly in evidence; he had struck a small leader which bore gold, and was endeavouring, with infinite pains, to trace this to its connection with the parent reef. The spot where he was working was about half-an-hour's walk distant. Thither he went every morning early; thence he returned at dusk every evening. When hot on the scent of gold the Reefer was not a man to be lightly interfered with. He had made it clear to the boy from the beginning that his help was not required, or even desired, except towards filling the pot with meat. Thus the two had little or no intercourse.

The boy was more and more struck by the individuality of his new friends; they were so utterly unlike any others of their class that he had foregathered with. As the intimacy grew, Fourie told more of the details of his history. It appeared he was not quite orthodox in his religious views, and had had in consequence a serious quarrel with the pastor of his church. This had happened years back. One result was that Fourie was under a kind of ban among his own people. His wife had shared his views. The children, or at all events the two elder ones, having natural strength of character, and being cut off from intercourse with other young humans, developed on lines of their own.

Fourie had strains of idealism and even of philosophy. He loved his violin, but his musical ambition

never, alas! soared beyond reels. Like a child in everything appertaining to social mankind, this Boer was almost supernaturally wise in interpreting the laws governing forest, field and sky. He had a naturally kind heart and a deep love for nature. Thus he only killed ordinary game when meat was required. Solitude and the despiteful usage of his fellow-men had not soured his disposition. His only foe was the lion; and the lion, which he pursued constantly and implacably, he met and vanquished in fair, open encounter.

As time passed, the girl and the boy became more unconstrained towards each other. The girl had much innate refinement, and was very intelligent. Between her and the boy there was little articulate speech; the silence of the wilderness had invaded their souls. When the wilderness unveils the fulness of its beauty to a human being speech becomes largely superfluous. For although the wilderness is full of clear indications, it is mostly inarticulate, and those who dwell there must interpret its dumb alphabet or perish. Between these two human creatures signs gradually took the place of words; glances became eloquent; a gesture often conveyed more than a sentence.

The girl could hold a rifle straighter than most men; her frame was tireless; she could endure hunger and thirst without wilting. She had often been her father's hunting companion. When Fourie now planned a more than usually extended expedition she decided to take part in it.

The Boer absolutely lusted after lions to slay, but no spoor was to be found anywhere within a day's

walk of the camp. However, away down near the junction of the Olifant and the Letaba was a locality which he had previously visited with satisfactory results. So thither it was decided to go. The Reefer remained behind, with him Fourie's little son.

So one still, cool morning, when a transparent haze filled the valley and hung like the shadow of a dream over the forested plains that stretch from the foot of the mighty mountains to the far-off Lebomba, the boy, the girl and the Boer started on their adventure. Their course led along the southern bank of the Olifant. The mountains were soon left behind, and then, on the plains, the boy—for the first time in his life—saw large game in true profusion. All day long as they advanced could be seen the varied population of the wild melting before them into the gloom ; for the forest, although continuous, was not dense except in the immediate vicinity of the river. Thus the eye could range for a couple of hundred yards on every side.

Owing to the late local rains the pasturage was good, so all the game from the surrounding arid spaces had flocked in. Occasionally the landscape resembled a kaleidoscope, so dense and varied were the manifestations of animal life. Buffaloes would hurtle through the undergrowth, swerving to avoid the tree-trunks with the agility of cats. A black rhinoceros, its wicked-looking head low near the ground, would dash fiercely away, its horn dividing the tangled brushwood after the manner of the cut-water of a boat. Families of wild pigs, their tufted tails held straight up, trotted off with swift quaintness.

Herds of gentle giraffes, disturbed at their browsing on the high branches, swayed out of sight, their long necks undulating from side to side. Quaggas, sleeping in the glades, sprang up at their sentinel's warning stamp, and fled, waking thunders with their hoofs. Fierce-eyed gnus swiftly ambled away. Antelopes, from the harte-beeste, big, awkward and ungainly, to the little russet impala, the very embodiment of sylvan grace, crowded the ever-opening vistas.

All day long they tramped without firing a shot, for ammunition had to be husbanded. Just before camping at sundown the boy shot a tsessabi, the flesh of which is among the very best the wilderness affords. To their astonishment several of the Balala appeared on the scene. One of these was a little, elderly man who appeared to be a sort of leader, and who seemed to have attached himself to the boy.

They camped on the river-bank amid scenery more lovely than any pen could describe. The clear stream, eddying and whirling among great grey rocks, was nearly three hundred yards wide. Groves of splendid trees, dark green and luxuriant, lay in an almost continuous chain along the water's edge, only separated from each other by little spaces of green sward. On one of these they camped. Across the river a long, even wall of sheer cliff hung like a rampart over the flood. It was about a hundred feet high. Along its summit giant trees were silhouetted against the sky; masses of variegated creeper fell like cataracts over its face.

III

Day passed swiftly after day, each like a cup full to the brim of joy. The hunters went to sleep soon after dusk, leaving the tending of the fire in the hands of the Balala. Every morning in the grey dawn the girl would steal away to bathe in one of the secluded reaches of the river. The boy would watch for her going and then set about preparing coffee. This would be ready by the time she returned, with her waved, glossy hair drying on her shoulders and the brightness of the morning shining from her face. Then he would go to bathe and the girl would prepare breakfast.

Silence, more eloquent than speech, enmeshed these two more and more in mutual comprehension. An idea took root and grew in the mind of the boy that he had found the environment best suited to him; that a life spent in this teeming wilderness, with the girl at his side, would be good. What part had he in civilisation—in that society of conventional men and women which had lured him on, almost to his ruin, and flung him contemptuously aside when he ceased to amuse?

Before being an agriculturist, man was a hunter. This explains the circumstance that for many the hunting instinct—the lust to kill for the sake of killing—when once indulged in becomes so haunting and dominant that all other pursuits pall. Atavism is a curious and an awful thing; an influence may rise through the dark detritus of inconceivably remote time, take our lives in its shadowy hands,

and shape them to strange ends. Under the spell of the wild, the boy reverted to the stage of primeval man.

Here, then, was his paradise. Why not, therefore, take this deep-bosomed Eve to mate, and enter into his inheritance. But at this stage was it love that he felt for her? He was not sure. She attracted him strongly, but there was also an occasional feeling of slight repulsion. He had always been moody and changeable. Little, undefinable contraventions on her part of that code of conventionality which he affected to despise, but which is always ineradicable in those whose childhood has passed in a refined home, jarred on his sensibilities.

The present—yes—but what of the future? The girl was innocent and modest. A spice of coquetry in her would have completed his subjugation; but she was absolutely direct and natural. The forces of love held all the approaches to his heart; the outworks had fallen, one by one, but the citadel was still held by a few obstinate doubts.

As a lion-hunt the expedition had so far not been a success. Every night the low rumbling, occasionally changing to a snarl, of the great beasts of prey could be heard in various directions. Fourie and the Balala, who were now in good condition and equal to any amount of work, went out indefatigably on the spoor day by day. Many lions were thus followed to their lairs in dense patches of reeds and grass, but they always managed to escape unseen. The vegetation was too green to kindle. The full-fed lion is usually a coward; it is when

hungry that his courage rises and he becomes terrible.

They were but three days' easy walk from the wagon when it was decided to return. On the morning they started the first lion fell. Just before dawn they heard the unmistakable sound of a kill, so when day broke they stole to the spot where it took place, which was about a mile away. They found four lions eating the carcase of a quagga. Three fled at once ; the other, a magnificent brute with a great coal-black mane, would not surrender his meat, so he dropped on his belly and faced the intruders.

The underbrush was scanty ; nevertheless the lion, for all his size, could scarcely be seen. Just the top of his head and the ridge of his back were visible. Fourie stepped forward to within forty paces and took careful aim. The great tail began to wave from side to side, striking the ground with the force of a flail. With the shot the hindquarters of the lion heaved mightily into the air, and fell forward towards the hunter. After a few convulsive struggles the limbs loosened ; then the great helpless creature rolled over on its side and lay still. The bullet had grazed the top of the head and buried itself in the spine, between the shoulders.

That night they camped just below the enormous gates through which the Olifant breaks to reach the low country. The mighty, sheer, table-formed masses, arising from dense forest, bulked huge against the stars. The cataract-speech of the river

filled the sounding gorge with softened thunder. To the boy it seemed as though Immensity stretched forth a finger to touch his brain and counteract the spell of sleep. He tried vainly to rest. The rich, slow, beauty-burthened hours went by. Canopus wheeled high over the Cross. A sense of the imminence of something strange thrilled him; his soul seemed to stand tiptoe upon the summit of expectation and stretch forth its hands.

The fire had dwindled; he built it anew, and the crackling flames shot up high through the windless dark. The boy glanced to where the girl lay, near her father. Her eyes were open. The boy beckoned to her. She sat up and hesitated for an instant; then she arose and came to his side.

He took her hand and led her away into the gloom. He kissed her on the lips and the kiss was returned. The voices of the gorge swelled to a warning dissonance as a breeze from the west gathered their thunders into a sheaf and hurled it to the plains below, but the lovers heard it not. The roar of a killing lion and the scream of its stricken prey startled the forest creatures for miles around, but the sound of the tragedy passed over these two, unheeding. The mystery and the wonder of the desert, the lust of the spoiler, the terror and anguish of the victim—each blindly following the awful law of its being—was around them, but Love lent wings of flame that bore them to the stars, and stayed with his wonder-working hand the running of the sands of Time.

Dawn stole, virginal, from the sea and sought their transfigured faces. The splendour of morning, which had its habitation for a space on the mountain crags, found its counterpart in their eyes. The cataracts shouted with their joy ; the falcons chanted it as they soared into the sunshine.

They had no thought for the future ; the present was all-sufficient. The wilderness was theirs, and the fulness thereof. Here was a fair kingdom in which they reigned as victorious king and gracious queen, without the tiresome superfluity of subjects.

. . . . . .

That day, for the first time, they planned to be alone together on the march. With feet made languid by excess of joy they lingered whenever a locality of more than usual beauty was reached. At midday Fourie, who had got somewhat far ahead, was wondering at their laggardness.

A distant shot, followed by two others in quick succession, recalled them to practical realities, so they hurried forward on the spoor. When they reached Fourie he was sitting under a tree regarding with satisfaction a large lion he had shot, and which three Balala were engaged in skinning. Tied to a shrub close by were two young lion-cubs.

"See, Anna, what I have caught," cried he ; "have a look at the little brutes before I kill them."

"No, no," said the girl, "they are too young to kill. Let them go. Where is their mother?"

"That is what I cannot understand ; I have never heard of such young cubs being left behind by

their mother. But I'm not going to let them go, perhaps to kill some one, as my father was killed."

The girl's soul revolted from the idea of slaughtering these innocents. So full of new-found happiness was she that the taking of life or the infliction of pain was abhorrent. But she knew her father's implacable hatred of the whole lion race.

"Let me take them back to the camp," she begged; "I will tame them."

After advancing many objections Fourie gave a grudging consent. The little animals could be fed on soup until the camp was reached, then on meal and water. They were evidently only a week or ten days old, and resembled yellow cats with abnormally large, solemn faces. They showed no vice when handled, and seemed quite contented with their lot. The girl carried one and the boy the other, the three Balala being unable to do more than carry the skin of the animal just killed.

The halting-place for the night was an open, circular space surrounded by high trees. The boughs met overhead; it looked like a green-domed temple. The ground was almost clear of brushwood. In the centre the fire was lit. The river was only about two hundred yards distant. Supper was over, and the cubs, being hungry, were complaining in queer, guttural tones. They had been coupled together by means of a rein, the loop of which was fastened to a protruding root.

The boy took the only cooking utensil and started, a live firebrand in one hand and his rifle in

the other, for the river to fetch water for the soup. When he reached the fringe of low bushes which surrounded the camping-place he stopped for an instant and looked back. Fourie had removed the block from his rifle and sat oiling it near the fire. The girl was bending over the cubs, trying to soothe their impatience. She looked after the boy with a smile. His last sight of her face showed it lit by the flickering flame and radiant with an aura of love and happiness.

When the boy, returning, got within about fifty yards of the fire, his desert-tuned ear caught a sinister sound of low growling. He dropped the vessel of water and the firebrand, and rushed forward, bursting through the fringe of bushes. There, full in the firelight, crouched a great, tawny lioness, roughly pawing the cubs. In an instant his rifle was at his shoulder; the lioness sprang into the air and fell back dead, shot through the heart.

The boy and the fire were the only living things in the firelit circle. Fourie was lying, his neck terribly lacerated, in a pool of blood. The girl lay on her face, absolutely still. The cubs had been mangled to death through the efforts of the mother to set them free.

He could not believe the girl to be dead. Thinking she had fainted from terror, he lifted her in his arms. Her head fell back, horribly limp. Her neck had been broken by a stroke from the lioness's paw.

. . . . . .

When the boy awakened from his swoon a figure was standing near him. It was that of the old man of the Balala. The boy sat up and tried to think. Then, with a lamentable cry, he sprang up and lifted the corpse of the girl in his arms. The head again fell back, the loosened wealth of burnished hair flowing like a cataract to the ground. The old waif of the desert stole silently away.

Later the old man returned, this time accompanied by two others. He touched the boy, who sat stupidly gazing at his dead, on the shoulder. The boy looked up with haggard, deathlike face, and the wholesome human sympathy of the old man's regard loosened the frightful tension of his soul. He fell into a paroxysm of tears.

After a while the old man again touched him on the shoulder and pointed westward, in the direction of the camp. Then, with a sweep of the hand to indicate that he would return, he melted into the darkness. The two other Balala remained behind, close at hand, and tended the fire.

. . . . . .

It was noon when the Reefer arrived. The ground was soft, so it did not take his practised arm long to dig a deep grave. In this they reverently laid the bodies of the girl and her father. At their feet were placed the dead cubs, for showing mercy to which such dire requital was dealt by that inscrutable power which so often chastises men for their virtuous deeds, and rewards them lavishly for their sins. Heavy stones were carried from the river terrace

close by and placed in such a way that the resting-place could not be disturbed.

. . . . . .

A few days afterwards the oxen returned, so the wagon, with its sad passengers, went back to the dead man's farm. The boy accompanied it and, after relating what had happened (which was regarded by all in the neighbourhood as the direct and unmistakable judgment of Heaven upon irreligion), he wandered forth once more, this time to be for ever a stranger among the sons and daughters of men.

BY THE WATERS OF MARAH

"And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter."—Exodus xv. 23.

I

It was in the old and, by some at least, ever-to-be-regretted days of the ox-wagon that the following strange experience befell me. These were days when the Boers were invariably hospitable to strangers (who did not arrive on foot), when the natives had still some respect for the white man, and when game was still to be had for the hunting on the high plains of South Africa.

We had left our wagons at Shoshong, in what is now Kama's country, and struck out with three pack oxen and six "boys" towards the north-west, vaguely hoping to reach Lake Ngami. At that time, a quarter of a century ago, little was known of that interior which has now become a sort of Cook's Tourist Route, and consequently the traveller had always the vague charm of the unknown around him, whilst the fluttering hem of the garment of the fascinating nymph, whose name is Adventure, gleamed in every thicket. Maps, it is true, existed, but were a distinct disadvantage to the wanderer, for the reason that all those extant were fearfully and

ingeniously incorrect. We had once nearly lost our lives through trusting to an indication of a supposed water-place upon a brand new chart prepared by a distinguished traveller, who believed every yarn told him, and who, it is now well known, did not visit half the places he described from alleged personal observation.

Dick Wharton, Sam Logan and I formed the party. We were all young, in good health, and keen shots. We hardly expected to reach the lake, but we knew that there was plenty of shooting to be had in the direction in which it lay, and that was all that we particularly cared about.

The country, usually a grim desert, was now a smiling garden. For two seasons rain had fallen in phenomenal abundance, and the wayward bounty of Heaven had caused the long-dormant vegetation to spring up over the length and breadth of the land. The flowers were scattered everywhere in bewildering beauty, and the insects held constant revel in the mild sunshine. Water was to be found by digging, hardly a foot deep, in every donga, and all the game in Africa seemed to have collected in the northern zone of the Kalihari.

We wandered on, taking our journey easily, resting as suited our mood whenever we reached some particularly charming spot. Indeed, it almost seemed as though the wild creatures had the same æsthetic sense as ourselves, for it was almost invariably at such places that we found game in the greatest plenty. The delight of those days is, and

I trust ever will be, an abiding remembrance. We slept comparatively little, for sleep seemed but a waste of time, and it was better to lie awake under the soft stars or the regal moon, listening to the wild sounds of the desert, than to waste our precious hours in barren unconsciousness. Whilst our three pack oxen, tied to a tree hard by and surrounded by a fence of thorn-trees, chewed the cud of plenty or drew the deep, sighing breath of bovine alarm, we would lie watching the flames leaping from the kindled logs, and listening to the grunting of the lions, the booming of the ostriches, or the screaming of the hyænas. We did not dread the lions, for we knew that where game was plentiful the king killer of the waste seldom troubled man or his cattle. Our natives could always be trusted to keep the fires alight. They were continually full of meat, and therefore happy.

I may as well say at once that we never reached Lake Ngami. As a matter of fact, we did not go much more than two-thirds of the way to it. We dawdled upon our course to such an extent that we were obliged to return from a spot only seven days' march beyond the Lutyahau River.

Hunters familiar with the regions indicated have all heard of the bitter wells, with the unpronounceable Bushman name, not a great many days' journey from Anderson's Vley. The water found in these wells is extremely poisonous to Europeans. A few Bushmen, who have habituated themselves to its use, are always to be found in the vicinity, but woe

betide the unhappy human creature of any other breed who slakes his thirst at this poisonous spot; he will almost assuredly die if obliged to drink the water for three days in succession. This spot can only be visited by hunters with safety upon the rare occasions when the rains have fallen so heavily on the surrounding country that water is obtainable in the sand-filled rocky hollows, of which this area of the desert is full. Taking advantage of the splendid condition of the country, we determined to make a detour to the southward for the purpose of visiting this little-frequented spot.

We arrived late one afternoon, and found the place deserted, although showing signs of having recently been inhabited by human beings. We knew what had taken place—the Bushmen had fled in alarm at our approach, but we felt sure of meeting some of them within the next few days.

The locality was desolate in the extreme, for the rich vegetation ceased on every side within about a mile of the muddy puddles. These formed a small group in a shallow depression some hundred yards in diameter. The surrounding soil was evidently strongly charged with some alkaline substance, which lay thickly on the surface in the form of white powder. The water had a brownish tinge where it oozed out of the soil, and gave forth an unpleasant smell, as though of decaying vegetable matter.

We soon found sweet rain-water in a donga close by, so decided to rest for a few days. Rest is hardly the right term to use, for we worked exceedingly

hard. Each member of the party had his own favourite game. Dick was not content with the slaughter of anything less than the King of Beasts, Sam enjoyed shooting koodoos more than anything else, whilst the slaying of the gentle giraffe brought the keenest joy to my hunter's heart. Consequently, we three, although the best of chums, seldom hunted together. Each preferred to take a couple of "boys" and follow the chase of that which his soul panted for.

On the day following our arrival at the bitter wells I took my rifle and wandered forth towards a considerable clump of comparatively large trees, which could be descried about seven miles away to the westward, and where I expected to meet with my favourite game. It was nearly midday when I reached the trees, and just upon entering the grove I was astonished to see the spoor of a large sandal leading along a game-path. The spoor was certainly not that of a Bushman, its length being too great and the impression too heavy. I pointed it out to one of my followers, who uttered a low exclamation of surprise, and then we followed the track silently into the thickest part of the grove.

On turning a sharp corner we suddenly stood still, for a small hut, or "scherm," constructed of bushes and fragments of skin, stood before us. It was not so much a hut as a kind of movable screen such as the Hottentots use—one that could be shifted with little difficulty to meet the changing wind. Its back was towards us. After pausing for a few

seconds, I stepped forward and looked under the roof of the structure from the other side.

Again I stood still, my eyes being riveted by the strangest-looking human creature it has ever been my lot to behold. The man was reclining on a few jackal skins, and resting on his elbow. He was quite naked except for a tanned hide, which was tied with a thong around his middle. In spite of the dark and rough condition of his skin, his long matted hair and beard clearly showed him to be an European. The hair hung over his shoulders in a white fleece, and the beard lay upon his chest in a long silvery tangle. His face was a striking one; the forehead was high and intellectual, the nose prominent and somewhat hooked, the eyes were dark and deep, and gleamed splenetically from under the shaggy and prominent brows.

My two followers ran back with exclamations of terror, and crouched behind a bush about thirty yards away. I myself, feeling more astonishment than alarm, looked hard at the man, who gazed back fixedly without the least appearance of surprise or embarrassment. Then I took a step nearer and spoke.

"Good day. Who are you?"

"One who will never trouble you as much as you trouble him," came the surly reply.

The voice had an even, metallic tone—a tone which I was strangely reminded of years afterwards when I first listened to a phonograph. There was a queer suggestion of impersonality about it. I tried

to think of something to say, but could not find a word, so taken aback was I. The man's eyes rested on mine like those of an animated sphinx, and seemed to exercise a queer kind of mesmerism. Withdrawing mine with difficulty, I glanced around the "scherm" and took a rapid survey of its contents. I noticed a number of sticks, pared flat, and with the edges full of little notches. A Bushman's bow and a quiver of arrows were stuck behind one of the supports, and a skin wallet hung from another. Several curiously knobbed sticks lay on the floor, and a lump of raw meat, which was in course of being invaded by an army of small red ants, was stuck in the fork of a stake planted in the ground. Several ostrich egg-shells, with small wooden pegs inserted at each end, lay about.

The silence became oppressive. The man still gazed at me, and I glanced nervously and rapidly at him from time to time. The thought that he perhaps was a lunatic crossed my mind, and I quickly surveyed his build in view of the possibility of a struggle. The conclusion I came to was that I should prefer to decline a contest. The man was old and rather emaciated, but his muscles looked as hard as the pasterns of a springbuck.

"Is there much game hereabouts?" I hazarded.

The strange being suddenly stood up, and I was astonished at his height. I involuntarily stepped back a couple of paces as he emerged from the "scherm." He stretched forth his hand towards me, but not in a threatening manner—although his eyes

seemed to blaze—and spoke in the same strange pitch, but much more loudly than before.

"Is not the desert wide enough that you come here to trouble me? You have the whole world for your hunting-ground, and I have only this little spot. Get you gone and trouble me no more, or I will get the Bushmen to drive you off."

I began to lose my nervousness completely—although I could not help seeing that the man's threat was a serious one. Bushmen had not been giving much trouble of late years; however, I knew that they existed in considerable numbers in that particular area of the Great Desert. Probably this strange being possessed some influence over them, and if so, nothing would be more easy than to have us killed when sitting around our camp-fire by means of a volley of poisoned arrows poured in at point-blank range. Such occurrences had happened before.

"Man alive," I said in a cheerful voice, "I don't want to interfere with you; I came here quite by accident, and I shall go on my way without giving you any trouble whatever. Ta-ta—I hope you are enjoying your picnic."

I turned on my heel, but he called out to me to stop, and I again faced round.

"How many are there in your party?" he said, after giving me a long, fixed look.

"Two other white men and six boys."

"Wait for just a moment. I want to have a few words with you."

I set my rifle against the stump of a tree and stood before him with my arms folded. The creature seemed to have become more human.

"Would it be of any use asking you not to tell your companions anything about your having met me?"

"Well—you see—I have my two boys with me; even if I hold my tongue they are sure to talk."

A queer ghost of a smile seemed to flit across the stern face.

"I know you will keep your word if you give it," he replied, "and I will make it right with the boys. Will you promise? Take time to think if you like."

A great pity for the poor creature before me seemed to swell in my breast. Why should I not grant his request? Why should I darken, in no matter how slight a degree, a life apparently overloaded by some great tragedy? Of course I felt flattered by his estimate of my veracity.

"Yes, I promise," I said.

His face softened, and the tension of his limbs seemed to relax. When next he spoke the tone of his voice had quite changed.

"Ah! I find that I am not as dead as I thought. Yours is the first English voice I have heard for over twenty years. I wonder what fate brought you here to wake me back to pain. Give me a grasp of your hand and then go."

I held out my hand, and he seized it with a grip

of iron. We looked into each other's eyes for a moment, and mine dimmed with tears.

"Can you not come away with us?" I asked.

He shook his head vigorously.

"Is there nothing I can do for you — give you?"

"If you have at your camp any sort of a knife to spare I should be glad of it."

"Right, I will bring you one to-morrow. And you need not fear that I will say a word about you. Of course I cannot answer for the boys."

I picked up my gun and strode away rapidly, not wishing to give him an opportunity of changing his mind. When I reached the bush behind which my boys were crouching, they looked towards, and then past me, with expressions of the utmost terror. I turned and found that the man was closely and noiselessly following me. He beckoned to the boys, who arose and followed him, crouching out of sight. I sat down and awaited events. In a few minutes the boys returned, their faces ashen and their heads bent. I strode on and they followed me in complete silence.

I did not then make for the camp, but for a low ridge to the northward, on which a number of "camel-thorn" trees were visible. Here I wounded a fine bull giraffe. Following the spoor took up the rest of the day, and the sun was down before the poor brute lay before me dead. We camped for the night alongside the carcase, there being a wet donga close at hand. After a good supper, in which

that most delicate of delicacies, giraffe marrow, was an important element, I lit my pipe and basked in the blaze of the logs. I had noticed that my two boys were silent and depressed.

"Wildebeeste," I said, addressing the senior, "what do you think of the man we saw to-day?"

Wildebeeste glanced uneasily over his shoulder into the darkness and replied in a low tone—

"I saw no man to-day, Bass; neither did Ghola, nor even the Bass himself."

Both boys covered their heads with the fragments of skin which did duty for clothing and lay down. When I addressed them a few minutes afterwards both pretended to be fast asleep, but I could tell by their breathing that they were wide awake.

The sun was high when I reached the bitter wells next morning. My two companions had gone away exploring to the southward; they had left a note explaining that they would probably not return till the following day. This suited me exactly. I had never been able to lie skilfully; I hated having to deceive my chums. It may, therefore, be well imagined that I was somewhat uneasy on the subject of my secret.

After a short rest, I again set off westward, taking with me the spare knife. The sun was just setting when I reached the grove. The strange man was still in his "scherm." A new piece of meat hung upon the forked stick; nothing else appeared to have been changed since the previous day. We

sat up the whole night—he talking and I listening to what surely must have been one of the saddest and strangest tales ever poured into a human ear.

I passed my word to the effect that for twenty years, not alone would I never mention a word of what he told me, but that I would not even write it down. It will, accordingly, be understood that a good deal of the language in which the tale is set forth is rather mine than his. I have, however, a very vivid recollection of the circumstances related —in fact many of the phrases used have never faded from my memory.

After various experiments as to the best mode of relation I find that telling as though in the first person seems the most effective.

II

"I WENT to sea as a boy and, in the late forties, was mate of a ship which ran ashore on the coast of the Cape Colony, somewhere to the eastward of Cape l'Agulhas. I disliked the sea; and when I managed to obtain a clerkship in a store in Cape Town, determined to spend the rest of my life ashore. But I soon sickened of town life. I had always longed to visit the great unknown interior and to shoot big game, but without means this was, of course, impossible.

"At length, I found myself with a few pounds in my pocket, so I bought a small wagon and a

team of oxen, and commenced business on my own account as a travelling trader. I used to obtain goods in Cape Town on credit, take them up country to barter with, and afterwards return with cattle and sheep, which I sold to the butchers at a good profit.

"My business prospered, so that within a few years I found myself in a position to realise my dream of taking a trip up-country. I possessed a strong, comfortable wagon, sixteen good oxen, and three smart ponies—all of which I had obtained by trading. I bought several good guns, a lot of gunpowder and lead, and, in fact, a complete hunting and trading outfit.

"I had no fixed plan. Time was no object, so I meant to travel northward in a leisurely manner, resting whenever I felt inclined to, or when my cattle required to pick up in point of condition. Being a handy man with tools I knew I could repair my wagon or guns should they require it. I spoke Dutch well, and I took a lot of stuff for the purpose of trading with the Boers for food.

"Always a solitary man, I did not feel the need of a companion, but I took two servants with me—an old Hottentot named Danster and his grandson, a lad of sixteen. These had been in my service for several years, and were willing to follow me anywhere.

"It was October when I started, and it was well on in September of the following year before I reached the Orange River. The course I had taken was somewhere to the westward of the usual trade

route. I wanted to see as much unknown country as possible, and I had an idea that gold might be found in the great, high, central plain. The rains had fallen more plentifully than for years previously —almost as heavily as they have fallen here this season—so I had an easy time of it. I just went slowly along, shooting game when I wanted meat and pausing when the desire to rest came over me. The farther northward I went, the scarcer became the farms, until at length the only people I met were the few wandering Boers who lived in wagons and mat-houses and moved about on the track of the rains.

"Fate or chance led me to a bend in the Orange River where a certain Boer and his family dwelt. Although the family spoke nothing but Dutch, this Boer was a Scotsman by birth. He had come to Africa when a child, and had spent his life on the fringe of the desert. He was now old, blind, and feeble, and had evidently not long to live. The family consisted of three sons — the eldest being twenty-five and the youngest nineteen years of age —and a niece, a girl of eighteen. These young men were the three greatest scoundrels it has ever been my lot to meet, but the girl was beautiful and good, and I loved her from the first moment my eyes rested on her face.

"I will try and describe the homestead and its dwellers. The house was small and low, built of round stones with mud plaster and thatched with reeds. The furniture was rough-hewn from logs

carried down by the great river when in flood. The old Boer was rich in cattle, sheep and horses. Grain was grown on a patch of sandy ground which was sometimes fertilised by the river when at its highest flood. Brayed skins served principally for clothing and wholly for bedding.

"Piet, the eldest of the brothers, was a tall, melancholy man with a narrow face, thick lips, and hair the colour of a fox. Gerrit, the second, was short and powerfully built. He had black eyes, beard and hair, and his complexion was swarthy. He was passionate and cruel, and the poor old man used to shake at the sound of his voice. Sandy, the youngest, was a powerfully built fellow, and also had red hair. His face was like that of a weasel. He was lame from an injury received in childhood, but so strong that he could hold fast the leg of an ox no matter how hard the animal kicked. He seldom spoke, and he had the strongest aversion to meeting with his pale eyes even the glance of anyone else.

"And the girl—how shall a man describe the first and only woman he has loved—and that after she has been dead for twenty years? Alida was dark, dark as a gipsy, and of middle height. I had not seen much of women—I had never pleased them, nor had they been attracted by me—so, although thirty-five years of age, I had not thought of marrying. But here, in this God-forgotten corner of the wilderness, I suddenly came face to face with my mate, clad in rough skins that could not hide her

beauty, and as ready to go with me to the end of the world as I was to take her.

"Alida was the orphan daughter of the blind old man's only brother. He and his wife had both been killed by lightning in a mat-house when Alida was a baby, and the child had been dragged out from under the flaming roof by an old Bushwoman. Then her uncle adopted her, and she grew up in the rough, uncouth household like a gazelle among swine.

"It was a strange household: the old man lived in terror of his sons, and it was Alida who took his part and protected him from their violence. His wife had been dead three years, and he longed for the day of his own release. Every night he would pray aloud before going to bed, and the sons would mock him to his face. These three young men hated each other, and they all tormented the girl with proffers of love, she meeting their advances with the utmost scorn.

"A few days after my arrival at the homestead Piet recommended me to send my oxen to graze on a certain ridge within sight of the house, where the grass looked green and luxuriant. I did so, and within three days all my team except four were dead. The ridge was covered with the dreaded 'tulp,' which is deadly poison to all cattle. I am satisfied that the three brothers put their villainous heads together and devised this infamy with the view of getting possession of the contents of my wagon, which they coveted. I was in despair, for I could see no plan of replacing the cattle except by parting

with most of my trading stock, and without this I could not proceed upon my trip. There appeared no way out of the difficulty, so I thought to remain where I was for a short time and then endeavour to make my way back to Cape Town.

"Such is the effect of a guilty conscience that the three ruffians could not bear to be in my presence; they appeared to dread my face, so they spent most of their time away from the homestead. In fact they made a practice of taking their guns early in the morning and making for the veldt, whence they returned late at night, and at once went sulkily to bed. Thus, they never suspected that there was anything of the nature of love between Alida and myself, whereas we had come to an understanding within a week of the disaster to my cattle. It came about thus. One night after Piet had come in, I heard Alida reproach him for his dastardly deed, which he did not attempt to deny. Next day, when the coast was clear, I mentioned the subject to her, and she burst into a flood of tears. Then I tried to comfort her, and we soon found out that we were more important to each other than all else that the world contained.

"I asked her to come away with me, but she refused to leave the old man, so I made up my mind to stay near her, at all risks, until his death, and then to take her and make her my wife. I knew that the old man could not live much longer; he became feebler day by day. The murder of my oxen, which he had heard discussed, preyed upon his mind to

such an extent that he became rapidly weaker, and at length was unable to leave his bed.

"I heard of a Hottentot camp situated some three days' journey away, up the river, so I sent old Danster, my servant, to see if he could purchase any cattle there. My idea was to dispose of some of my stock-in-trade and acquire a sufficient number of oxen to enable me to get away with my wagon as soon as ever Alida should be free. The brothers had refused to sell me any cattle except at an impossibly exorbitant rate. I knew there would be extraordinary difficulty in getting Alida out of the clutches of her cousins, but the thing had to be accomplished somehow or another.

"In six days' time Danster returned with a favourable report, so I made secret preparations for my departure. By this time the brothers had begun to feel suspicious of my relations with their cousin, so one of their number always hung about the homestead.

"My intention was to load three of my four remaining oxen, which had been trained to the pack, with tobacco, coloured handkerchiefs and other stuff which I knew the Hottentots valued, and then steal away, unobserved if possible. I reckoned on being able to obtain six animals. These, with my other four, would suffice to pull the wagon with its diminished load. Danster had done his best to induce the Hottentots to bring their cattle down for me to see, but the reputation of the brothers was such an evil one that no one from the encampment would venture near the farm.

"At the same time preparations for a journey, the object of which I never learned, were being carried on by the brothers. Guns, saddles and other gear were furbished up, and horses carefully selected out of the half wild herd. Alida managed to let me know that Piet and Gerrit were going away, and were not expected to return for five or six days. I looked upon this as a piece of good luck, and determined to take my departure immediately after they had started.

"Next morning at daybreak the two mounted their horses and rode forth, and no sooner were they out of sight than I sent Danster to drive up my oxen. The packs were ready, so I hurriedly adjusted them and, after bidding farewell to Alida and the old man, made haste in the direction of the Hottentot camp. The last thing I saw as I left the homestead was the evil face of Sandy peering like a weasel round the corner of the building.

"I travelled all day and camped at sundown. So tired was I that I fell asleep at once, leaving old Danster to collect fuel and tie up the oxen. The distance I had travelled was not great, but the slowness of the gait of the oxen had tired me. The last thing I remember is seeing old Danster nodding drowsily over the newly-kindled fire. His grandson had been left at the farm to look after my remaining ox.

"I cannot upon natural grounds account for the next thing I became cognisant of. I found myself standing up, looking at the figure of the old Boer,

which stood on the other side of the fire. It was splashed by the flickering flame against the black night, and as clear to my startled gaze as you are at this moment. The sightless eyes were wide open and full of unwonted expression, and one arm was extended imperatively in the direction of the homestead. There was an expression of sternness on the worn face which I had never previously seen, and the wasted form seemed instinct with dignity.

"I never doubted that it was indeed the old Boer in the flesh that stood before me, but my mind was in a whirl of wonder as to how he had managed to follow me, and I never doubted that Alida was at hand, but an eddying gust of smoke filled my eyes, and I closed them for an instant. When I opened them again the figure had vanished, and then I knew it for a vision.

"In an instant the truth, clear and inevitable, pierced my brain—Alida was in danger and the old man was dead; his spirit had come to warn me. I seized my gun and bandolier from where they lay, close to the head of my couch, took a hurried glance at old Danster, who was huddled, snoring, close to the fire, and plunged into the darkness.

III

"I HAD a long distance to cover, so I husbanded my strength. The night was calm, still and starlit when I started. I judged the time to be about midnight. My mind was in a curiously exalted condition;

clear, tense and braced to its purpose like a tempered steel spring. I felt that I could have swept an army of men or devils from my path. My course lay across a succession of low, wide ridges with gently sloping sides, each culminating in an abrupt backbone of bare boulders, the whole inclining slightly towards the river.

"Whenever my way led up hill I walked. On reaching the top I drew breath for a few seconds, and then went down the next slope at a swinging trot. I found both strength and wind improve as I proceeded. Dawn just began to flicker as I reached the comb of the last ridge, from which I knew that the homestead was visible by daylight about three miles away. Then something which I had taken for a stone in my path arose before me, and in a few seconds Alida stood revealed. She stretched out her hand towards me with a gesture of appeal; I dropped my gun and folded her in my arms. Neither of us spoke a word.

"After a few seconds she disengaged herself from my embrace, took my hand and led me forward towards the homestead. The glimmer of dawn began to merge into the gold of morning, and by the time we reached the dwelling the level shafts of sunlight were searching the crests of every tree and kopje. Although Alida had not once broken her silence I knew that something terrible had occurred, but I felt no curiosity; I did not wish the ear to anticipate the eye in the revelation which was about to be made. The front door of the homestead stood

wide open ; no sign of life was visible, and the only sound which smote on my tense ear was the howling of a dog down near the river.

"Pausing before the doorway, Alida and I looked into each other's eyes for an instant, during which earth and sky seemed to pause in dreadful expectancy, and the pulse of time to cease. The girl's face was drawn and pallid, and wore an expression of the bitterest agony. She took my hand and drew me into the house.

"The front room was in the same condition as when I had last seen it, except that the table bore the remains of last evening's meal, and that a chair lay overturned against the wall, as though it had been hurriedly flung out of someone's way. The old man's bedroom opened to the left, and into it Alida led me.

"The wooden shutters were closed, so the only light was the faint glimmer which filtered through the front room. Alida strode to the window and, avoiding something which lay on the floor, threw back one shutter. In an instant the room was flooded with sunshine. On the bed lay the old man, dead, with the same expression on the worn face which I had noticed in my vision of the previous night. Under the window lay the corpse of Sandy, with a deep gash on the right temple, from which a trickle of black blood had oozed and congealed upon the clay floor.

"The whole room was in a state of disorder, and showed signs of a violent struggle. I passed my arm

round Alida's body and drew her, half-fainting, from the room. We walked some distance from the house and seated ourselves in the pure, bright sunshine. Then she told me her tale.

"The old man had been taken with what must have been a fit immediately after supper on the previous evening, and died within a few minutes. Sandy went outside, and Alida remained with the body to carry out the necessary arrangements. About midnight Sandy returned, and tried to induce her to go to her room. She refused, and he began to use force. Then his brutish intention became clear to her. In the very room where the dead man lay this fiend laid his hot hands upon the girl who had grown up in the house with him like his sister. Fortunately she was strong, and able to make an effective resistance. In the struggle his foot slipped, and he fell with his head against the sharp wooden corner of his father's cartel bedstead; this pierced to his brain through the thin bone, and the foul brute fell, dead, to the floor.

"She showed me the black bruises upon her beautiful arms and shoulders, and I kissed them, one by one. Then I left her sitting upon the stone and went to drive up the cattle, which, fortunately, were close at hand in the big river bend. I could not find old Danster's grandson; in fact, not a soul was to be seen about the place. The Hottentots had evidently got scent of the tragedy, and bolted.

"After driving the cattle into the kraal, I called Alida to my assistance, and together we selected sixteen of the best. She knew all the animals individu-

ally. We caught them by passing reims over their horns. Then we filled the wagon—which stood close by—with provisions, ammunition, and other necessary things. My goods had been stored in a little outhouse ; I selected some of these and added them to the load. Before noon the team stood ready in the yoke. I entered the house and took a last look at the scene of the tragedy. Upon coming from the room Alida met me in the doorway—

"'Bring him with you, and we will bury him beyond the river,' she said.

"I returned to the room and wrapped the body in a large kaross which lay upon the bed. Although much emaciated, the body seemed strangely light for its build. We laid it reverently upon the wagon-cartel, and I seized the whip. Alida took her place in front of the team as leader, and the heavy wagon rumbled down the stony track towards the river drift.

"We travelled about six hours before outspanning. It was then sundown, and we were on the southern verge of the great Kalihari waste, which is usually an arid desert, but was then like a rich meadow. In the darkness I set to work and dug a deep grave in the sand. Before we lowered the body into it, Alida drew the kaross back from the face and imprinted a long kiss upon the dead, smoothed-out brow of the man who had been for so long a father to her, and who had wearied so sorely for his death. Then she threw herself upon the ground at the grave-side and burst into passionate weeping. I placed heavy stones over the grave and

burnt loose gunpowder among them for the purpose of scaring off the jackals.

"At the first gleam of dawn we were again on our way. We knew we should be pursued, sooner or later, and I wanted to get beyond the range of pursuit so as to avoid, if possible, the necessity for shedding blood. In this there was no element of fear, for I felt strong and confident of being able to overcome the two ruffians. But I knew it would be necessary to kill them if they overtook us, and I had always shrunk from taking the life of a fellow-creature—no matter how vile—even in self-defence.

"We had no fixed plans. Alida knew no more than I of the country before us. We were on no track, but just steered vaguely northward, taking our direction from the sun and the stars. Water was to be found almost everywhere; besides, the whole desert was strewn with "tsamai" melons, on which we, as well as the cattle, could exist should the water fail. Game was plentiful and tame, so we never lacked meat. Each night as we camped we collected fuel, and built two large fires for the purpose of keeping off the lions, one just behind the wagon and the other in front of the team. The front yoke we used to peg down firmly, to prevent the oxen, which were tied in pairs along the chain, from rushing back on the wagon, in the event of a panic being caused by wild beasts. We divided the night into two watches, of which I took the first. The oxen were well trained, so the services of a leader were not often required, and Alida was

thus enabled to sleep for long periods as the wagon crawled slowly over the velvet-like sand.

"Thus passed five days, and on the morning of the sixth old Danster turned up. He had waited for my return a day and a night, and then gone back to the homestead on my spoor, arriving on the evening of the second day after I had left him. He found the house just as we had left it, but feeling that something was wrong, had been afraid to enter, so he took cover close by and waited for daylight, when he traced the wheel-tracks of our wagon down to the river. Little Slinger, his grandson, he could not find, although he searched for him far and near. In the afternoon Piet and Gerrit arrived. Danster stole up to a bush, from which he could observe all that went on near the house. He saw the brothers moving about excitedly and gesticulating wildly. Little Slinger soon afterwards appeared; he had evidently been hiding in the bush, and emerged, driven out by starvation. The boy was seized by Gerrit and dragged into the house. He was shortly afterwards dragged out again, and then Piet shot him dead before the door.

"Danster saw the brothers drive in the mob of horses, saddle up two, and place a small pack upon a third. Then they started on the track of our wagon. Danster followed on foot, and passed the two when camped for the night. Since then he had travelled night and day to overtake us, and he only arrived just in time to give warning. I at once

determined to await the approach of our pursuers, who were now so close that we could not hope to escape them. Personally, I had no doubt as to the result of the encounter. I did not want the woman I loved to stain her sinless hands in blood, be it ever so guilty, so I refused her offer of assistance in the conflict. But she took a solemn oath that if I were killed she would take her own life.

"I knew that I should inevitably have to destroy these men, but I, nevertheless, determined not to do so without having absolute proof that they meant to murder me. In the long silent watches of the recent nights, when earth lay speechless to the stars, I had thought out a plan in view of the probable contingency, and this plan I proceeded to put into execution. These men should have their chance, and if they meant anything less than absolute murder, my right hand might perish before I would slay them.

"So I yoked the team to the wagon once more, and drew it onward for a few hundred yards to a spot where two dunes nearly met, and where the drift-sand lay loose and soft. Then I halted the wagon, letting it appear as though the oxen had been unable to draw it any farther. The oxen I unyoked and sent forward in charge of Danster, telling him, if he heard shooting, shortly followed by a shout from me, to bring them back at once.

"Then I gathered a quantity of fuel, carefully selecting a number of logs of heavy, close-grained wood, which might be depended upon to keep alight

for hours. I felt so sure that no attack would be made before dark, that I proceeded with my preparations in a most leisurely manner. We built the pile ready for kindling, but waited for sundown before setting it alight.

"In the meantime, Alida had—under my directions—taken a couple of yokes and some pillows, and of these made dummy figures, which she dressed in some of our garments. Then I scooped out a comfortable-looking couch in the soft dune-side, close to the pile of fuel, and in the bottom of it laid a kaross. Upon this we placed the two figures, side by side, and over them we spread another kaross. Above the head of one figure was laid Alida's 'cappie,' with the hood drawn over the face as though to keep off the dew. Over the head of the other my coat was laid in the same manner, my hat being carelessly thrown down alongside. Within arm's-reach one of my spare guns lay propped upon forked sticks, so as to keep it clear of the sand.

"We finished our preparations just after the sun had sunk, but I afterwards added a slight touch here and there for the purpose of improving the general effect. I remember Alida clinging to my arm in terror, because, just as dusk was setting in, I returned and placed one of my pipes on top of the hat, where the metal top glinted brightly in the firelight. Then we climbed into the wagon, let the canvas flap fall, and sat silently awaiting developments.

"The sides of the canvas cover buttoned to the woodwork of the tilt, but we unbuttoned sufficient

of it to give us, when we lifted it slightly, a good view of the fire, the couch with the dummies lying in it, and a considerable space surrounding these.

"I sat in the wagon grasping my double-barrelled gun. My pulse beat no faster than usual. The only emotion I was conscious of was extreme impatience. I was not even uneasy about Danster and the cattle, although I knew there were many lions about. I was quite certain that the two human jackals would fall into the trap I had so carefully set for them, but the waiting, which lasted until after midnight, seemed long and wearisome. It was Alida who first, with the sharp ear of the desert-bred, heard their approaching stealthy steps. She grasped my arm suddenly, and I knew quite well what she meant to convey, so I noiselessly cocked both barrels of my gun. Then she lifted the edge of the canvas a few inches, and I looked cautiously out.

"Gerrit was the first to appear; he had an evil smile on his face, and his wicked black eyes glittered like sparks. Immediately following came Piet. He looked haggard, and his pale lips moved convulsively. Both men were barefoot, and without hats or boots. They had, Danster afterwards ascertained when he traced their spoors backwards for the purpose of getting their horses, watched our camp for some time from the top of a dune a few hundred yards away, and there discarded their boots and superfluous clothing before advancing to their cowardly attack.

"Gerrit leading, the two stole up to within two yards of my supposed figure, and then Piet stretched

out his hand and took possession of my gun, which he placed out of reach. The two then pointed their guns, Gerrit at the head and Piet at the breast of the dummy. I noticed that both took some pains to avoid the possibility of wounding the other supposed sleeper with their shots, and for this a faint throb of something like pity woke in my mind. I saw the muzzles of the guns drop slightly in unison once, twice, and then, at the third drop, both weapons were discharged.

"I had covered Gerrit, and an instant after he fired he dropped with my bullet through his brain. Piet sprang wildly to one side, only, however, to meet my second shot, which pierced his chest from the left-hand side. He fell on his face with a gurgling groan, and died, clutching wildly at the grass.

IV

"I SPRANG out of the wagon, ran to the top of the dune and shouted to old Danster, who, to my astonishment, emerged from under a bush a few yards off. He had stolen back after leaving the oxen, replete and happy, lying down about a quarter of a mile away. The old Hottentot was filled with savage delight at little Slinger's death having been so completely avenged. He had his gun ready to shoot Piet had I fallen. Soon afterwards he brought up the oxen at a run, and we tied them to the yokes.

"We then dragged the two bodies to the back of the dune, and there left them to such sepulture as

the vultures and the jackals might give. A few spadefuls of clean white sand obliterated all superficial traces of the gruesome happenings in the vicinity of the wagon. Then Alida and I sat on the wagon-box, hand in hand, and watched until the night died and the gracious morning smiled upon the desert.

"I felt no remorse for what I had done, then or ever afterwards. My deed had been an execution, not a murder—an act of self-defence under the direst necessity. But I preferred to look upon it as a kind of judicial proceeding in which the culprits had been tried and sentenced at the bar of eternal justice, and handed over to me, unwilling, for execution.

"When the sweet, pure influences of dawn descended upon us after that night of blood, my heart-strings sang aloud and I thrilled with a sense of elation such as I had never previously experienced. I seemed to be king of a boundless realm, and my queen sat in beauty at my side. No word of love had passed between us since our flight, but she was now mine by every law of heaven and earth. The face of love had hitherto been shaded by terror and tears, but now it shone upon us, unclouded and bright as the morning. We were alone in the wild, untracked and boundless desert, but we would not have exchanged our wagon for a palace. To us a world of men would have been unbearable; the convulsion we had passed through had whirled us to some zone far from the ways of ordinary humanity. We were like two peerless eagles soaring in the heart

of the infinite blue, forgetful of the inconspicuous earth.

"Northward and ever northward we travelled. Wayward Nature spread a carpet for our delighted feet, and laid the fruits of the earth ready for our banquet. I felt so happy that it gave me pain to slay the innocent desert creatures when meat was required. I knew not fear of anything. I have looked calmly into the eyes of a furious lion when he crouched ready to spring at me, and laid him quivering at my feet with a shot which seemed as though it could not err.

"We happened upon the bitter wells quite by accident. Alida took a fancy to this spot, so we here formed our camp. We never dreamt of having to depend upon the bitter water for our sustenance, for the well in the donga close at hand looked as though it could never run dry. The Bushmen soon became our fast friends. Alida spoke their language, and they used to bring their sick and hurt to her for treatment. In one or two serious cases I was called in, and, owing to the fact of fortunate recoveries resulting, I acquired the reputation of a great magician. This reputation I have never lost.

"For a year no two human beings were ever happier than we. Alida could use a gun quite as well as I, so I felt no uneasiness about leaving her alone when hunting took me far afield. The desert, after rain, is full of wholesome vegetable food, and with this the Bushmen kept us well supplied. We had no want or desire which we could not satisfy.

Yes, that year was enough to atone for an eternity of pain.

"One thing only I dreaded—the possibility of Alida's becoming a mother, and at length the day came when I knew that my dread would be realised. This was just a year after our union.

"Soon afterwards the land began to dry up, and it was then I should have escaped to the Great Lake. But I was new to the climate, and I could make no guess as to what was coming. I hoped against hope for rain, but the sun scorched fiercer and fiercer. Now and then the clouds came up to mock our misery, but no drop fell from them. One by one the water-places failed, and the Bushmen began to flock in to the bitter wells from every direction. All had the same tale to tell. The desert, which had been awakened to beauty by the kiss of the fickle sky, was falling back into its ancient, death-like sleep. Until this present season it has never since awakened.

"The well in the donga close at hand held out long after the others had dried up, but it, too, began to show signs of soon becoming exhausted. The Bushmen still said that rain might come, and once, when the lightnings flickered on the north-eastern horizon, they held a dance to show their joy at the prospect of a deluge. But soon afterwards the air grew cooler, with a clear sky, and then the dwellers of the desert told us to bid good-bye to hope.

"The child was born—a strong, lusty boy—and Alida stood the ordeal bravely. But the sides of

our well began to crumble in, and the water to become horribly less. At length, after we had spent nearly a whole day in squeezing a single pannikin of moisture from the sand scraped up at the bottom of the pit, we sadly moved over to the bitter wells. The child was then two months old.

"Alida sickened from the water at once. Strangely enough, it had no effect upon me. Then the kind Bushmen searched all over the desert for the ostrich egg-shells which they had filled with rain-water and buried here and there so that the hunters might not die of thirst when their pursuit of game had taken them far away from their camps. This stuff, horrible as it proved, Alida was able to exist upon, but the supply soon became exhausted, and then the bitter water made her more ill than ever. Her illness poisoned the child; it wasted quickly and died in cruel pain.

"Alida never lifted her head after the child's death. By her wish I carried it over here for burial. At one time it seemed as though she might possibly become accustomed to the bitter water. Then, after unusually hot weather, its poison grew so virulent that even some of the Bushmen sickened. Alida became suddenly worse, and two days afterwards she died in my arms.

. . . . . .

"All this happened twenty years ago. On these notched sticks I have kept a record of the slow time. Alida and the child lie buried beneath the spot where we are sitting now; I shall never leave the place.

Every day the Bushmen bring me enough meat and water for my needs. Old Danster died of thirst when hunting in the desert, years ago.

. . . . . .

"The wild animals seem to know me, for they never attempt to do me any hurt. I do not think I am unhappy, for I can sleep when I like, and in my dreams I go over the past again and again. They used to teach me that another life comes after death. I do not know. . . . I know that if the soul lives when the body dies, our souls will be together. . . . But now I dream . . . and dream . . ."

THE HUNTER OF THE DIDIMA.

"You say, my Chief, that you wish me to relate a tale of the days of my youth, which are now so very far away. Well, I owe you homage for that you opened the door of the prison wherein my grandson lay, accused of a crime which another had committed. Last year I might have sent you a cow, which would have kept your children's calabash always full, but now that the Rinderpest has emptied my kraal I am a poor man—so poor that I cannot even offer you a drink of sour milk. There, behind that mat, lie the calabashes splitting from dryness. *Wau*, but it is hard for an old man who has owned cattle all his life to look every day into an empty kraal.

"Oh yes—about the tale. Well, I can tell you of an occasion when I was so near my death that for months afterwards I would start up in my sleep of nights and shriek aloud. The tale has often been told, but never the whole of it, for it is shameful for a man to relate how he wept like a woman and begged for his life. But now all the others are dead—and, for myself, why, I am only an old man of no account who will soon be dead too.

"In the days I speak of Makomo was Chief over all the country. I was a young man, and had only been married a few months. My father was one who

stood near the Chief. He was rich in cattle and his racing oxen were the best in the land. I had only recently been made a man. I was too young, so many said, for the rite, but the Chief's 'Great Son' was to be made a man at the time, and my father wanted me to be one of his blood-brothers. Then my father said I should marry and get grandchildren for him. In those days I cared for nothing but hunting, but my father began paying dowry for a girl, so I made no objection. She came to be the grandmother of Nathaniel, whom you know. He comes home twice every year from the Mission, and tells me that I am going, when I die, to a deep pit full of a very hot kind of fire. Well, perhaps I am, but I shall meet my Chief and my old friends there, but not Nathaniel, nor his grandmother.

"Makomo was a great Chief in those days, and no one ever dared to disobey him except the 'Abatwa,' the wild Bushmen who dwelt in the high mountains among the rocks and forests, and who shot people to death with shafts smeared with the poison of snakes. Brave as Makomo's men were when they fought the English, they dreaded the little men of the rocks, who could kill from afar without being seen or heard.

"From my earliest boyhood I loved nothing so well as hunting, and my favourite ground was the forest at the back of the Didima Mountain, which was full of buffalo, koodoo, bushbuck, and other game. On the top of the big mountain beyond it, which you call the Katberg, herds of eland used

often to browse. Other young men who loved the chase would accompany me, but I was always the leader.

"At a spot in the valley at the back of the Didima, far away from any other dwellings, lived a man called Bangeni, a great doctor. This man did not fear the Bushmen. For some reason or another they never interfered with him, even when they raided in the valleys far past his dwelling. He spoke their language, which sounded like the spitting of a nest of wild cats I once dug out of a hole. Men used to say that through his medicines Bangeni had the power of moving unseen from place to place, and that the Bushmen knew this and feared him accordingly. I do not know if this was the case, but it is certain that although the Bushmen were often seen in the rocks on the ridge above his kraal, and although they sometimes killed the herd-boys in the valley below, and drove off cattle, nothing of Bangeni's was ever taken.

"We all feared this man, and no one ever went to his kraal unless for medicine. Over and over again have I passed it when returning from hunting, but no matter how tired or thirsty I was I would never stop.

"One day, being alone in the forest, I found a young girl sleeping. She had a beautiful face, and a bosom like that of a partridge when the millet is ripe in the fields. She arose when I approached, but did not show the least alarm. We sat together and talked from noon until the sun had nearly sunk.

She was the daughter of Bangeni, and her name was Nongala. She spoke of sensible things in a low, soft voice. When we parted I already wished that my father had paid dowry for her instead of for the other one—Nathaniel's grandmother.

"After that day I never passed Bangeni's dwelling without calling. Nathaniel's grandmother got to hear of the girl, and I had to break several sticks upon her before she left off troubling. You know Nathaniel? Well, he is just like what she was.

"As I grew older I hunted more and more. My father was rich, and I was his 'great son,' so, whenever I heard of a good dog I used to try and buy it. We had no guns, but we were expert with the assegai, and besides we used to drive the game into stalked pits. *Mawo*, but these were great days. In the valley, where the buffaloes used to crash through the forest with my dogs baying behind, the Hottentots now grow tobacco. And I am an old, old man without a single cow, and my Chief is dead, and Nathaniel says I am going to the pit to burn in this new kind of fire.

"The mischief committed by the Bushmen at length became so bad that the people could stand it no longer, so Makomo called out an army for the purpose of clearing the mountains of these vermin. The occasion was that they had one day killed six herd-boys and driven a large troop of cattle off. Then Makomo saw that if he wished to hold the country any longer he must destroy the Bushmen.

"Every man who could wield an assegai was

called out, and the army was doctored on the night of the new moon. Next morning we went forth in three divisions, one of which held the level plateau which connects the Katberg Range with the great mountains farther back, and so cut off the retreat of the enemy. Another division went to the east of the Katberg and the third to the west of the Didima; then the three bodies moved towards each other in open order.

"The Bushmen retired without fighting when they saw how strong we were, and when they found their retreat cut off from the great mountain they took refuge in the caves and chasms of a high ridge which stood apart near the southern end of the plateau. We were joyful when we knew that at length we had the murderers where our hands could reach them.

"It was nearly nightfall when we formed in a ring around the rocks and scrubby bushes amidst which they lay, and our numbers were so great that no man was more than four paces from his companions on either side. Each carried a shield wherewith to ward off the poisoned arrows. For a long time it had been known that this attack must, some day, take place, and every man had been ordered to provide himself with a strong shield of ox-hide.

"Throughout the night we could hear no sound except now and then hootings and cries like those of owls and night-jars. These were the signals which the enemy made to each other. Just before daybreak they made an attempt to break through the ring, but we drove them back; not more than five or six managed to escape. We had expected this attempt,

and word had been sent round by the leader that should it take place the grass was to be fired. Within a few minutes the ridge was ringed with flame. The season was late summer, but the land was dry and the grass fit for burning. Not a breath of wind was stirring, so the ring of fire burnt slowly, and we closed in behind it as the ground became cool enough for our feet to bear it.

"Day was breaking when the fire reached long grass and brambles just beneath the summit among which the Bushmen lay concealed. Then they sprang out like monkeys from a cornfield when the dogs are let loose, and climbed to a bare mass of stone which topped the ridge. We rushed in at them through the flame, and they met us with a shower of arrows. It was a hard, bitter fight, but when the sun arose not a Bushman was left alive. The women, and even the little children, fought as bravely as the men, and bit our feet as we trod over them in the struggle thinking they were dead. Not one uttered a cry, even in the death-agony. Thirty-four of our men were struck down by the poisoned arrows, and of these more than half died in torment.

"Bangeni had fallen under suspicion of being in some way leagued with the Bushmen, on account of his property not having been carried off. He was too old a man to be expected to fight, so was not with the attacking force. As our men passed his dwelling on their way to the attack they had shouted threats as to what would be done to him after 'his friends,' as they called the Bushmen, had been reckoned with.

However, he now came forward with his medicines, and it was only the men whom he treated that recovered from their wounds. Therefore he was once more received into favour.

"After this slaughter we had peace, and for several years not a Bushman was seen anywhere near the Didima, although it was known that many still existed in the great mountain beyond it. Bangeni still dwelt at the old spot, and I continued to visit his kraal and meet Nongala. Nathaniel's grandmother became jealous, and I was compelled to break several more sticks upon her back. She often ran home, and I was glad to be rid of her, but her father always sent her back lest he should have to return the dowry-cattle. Eventually I sent my brother, with three oxen, to Bangeni to ask for Nongala as my second wife, and it was arranged that I should marry her at the coming time of green corn.

"One day in autumn, after the plough rains had fallen, I, with seventeen of my friends, went to hunt a troop of elands which were reported to have newly come to the top of the Katberg. We all brought our best dogs, and I had arranged through Bangeni with the Bushmen that they should help us to drive the game into a deep valley with a narrow pass at one end, where we could lie in ambush. This valley was some distance away, in the direction of the great mountain where the wild men, as we well knew, dwelt in large numbers. But we were young and had no fear. I thought that on account of my friendship with Bangeni none of the Bushmen would harm me,

and that my companions would be safe as well. Besides, the suggestion towards this hunt came from the Bushmen themselves.

"We found the game and drove it into the valley. When we arrived there, exhausted and out of breath, we found the bewildered herd huddled together in a rocky hollow, whilst around its sides stood a ring of the little people. Then we rushed in, and before the sun sank five of the elands lay dead. The rest broke through the circle and escaped, whilst we threw ourselves to the ground and lay there, panting.

"Two of the elands had fallen close together, within a few paces of a stream of water, and the others lay at different spots, none of which were more than a hundred paces away. We seventeen collected together where the two elands lay, and in a few minutes found ourselves surrounded by those who had driven the game for us. At first we suspected no treachery, but all at once we found that each of us had several poisoned arrows pointed at him, and that the notch of every arrow rested against the string of a drawn bow. Then we saw how we had been tricked; these people had enticed us thus far from our friends for the purpose of getting us into their power.

"One Bushman, who could speak our language, came forward, and with him we held a parley. They did not, he said, want to kill us but to hold us at ransom. What they wanted was cattle, and for cattle our Chief might buy our lives. To prove this they were willing to allow one of our number to go with

a message to Makomo, stating their terms. At this we felt much relieved ; some of our party were related to Makomo, and we knew that the cattle would be sent.

"But we had not heard all, and what followed made us burn with rage. We were required to give up our arms and then to submit to being bound, hand and foot. At first we angrily refused to do this, saying that we would rather die fighting than undergo such disgrace ; but when we looked at the bent bows and the arrows, each drawn back to the poison-smeared point, we felt as though hooded snakes surrounded us, poised to strike if we so much as moved hand or foot. We had seen the pain of those who died of their wounds after the fight, and we remembered how brave men had wept like women, begging of us to kill them as their blood had turned to fire. Death by spear or club we could have faced, but the thought of slowly dying from the snake-poison of the arrows made our hearts like the hearts of little children, so we yielded. One by one we cast our weapons to the ground and stepped forth to where they bound us with thongs. Each of us had his knees and ankles tied together and his hands fastened behind his back.

"Our weapons were collected into a heap ; our dogs were caught and tied to the bushes near the stream, and then our messenger, a man named Goloza, was allowed to go free. He was told to be back with the cattle by noon on the following day, and warned that if more than five men accompanied

him we would be killed as soon as their approach was signalled.

"After this the Bushmen lit fires and began to feast upon the game we had killed. They made merry around the carcases, eating such a quantity of meat that their bodies swelled until they looked like ticks on the dewlap of a cow in summer. In the early stages of the feasting they sang and danced, and then they played a curious game, in which some pretended to kill others, who, in their turn, pretended to be slain. We could hear from the noises around the other fires that similar feasting and dancing was going on at each carcase.

"Our throats felt as though filled with hot ashes, for we had sweated much in the chase, but though we begged for water they would not give us a drop. My heart seems even now to grow cold when I think of all that happened during that night. Our bonds were tightly drawn and galled us sorely, but our captors laughed at and taunted us when we prayed for relief.

"After they had feasted and danced through half the night, the Bushmen came and sat close to us, and some who happened to be able to speak our language began to converse with us. What they said made us lose all hope and wish for a speedy death to put us out of our pain. It appeared that their sending Goloza with the message was but a device for the purpose of getting cattle, and that they meant to kill us in any case. Their craft was such that they kept us alive in the event of Makomo sending

messengers ahead for the purpose of ascertaining that we were still alive before delivering the ransom cattle. They intended to kill us as well as the messengers as soon as the cattle were in their possession. This was to be their revenge for the slaughter we had inflicted upon their friends and relatives.

"We begged hard for our lives, offering large herds of cattle if our captors would let us send one of our number to collect from our kraals. We wept and moaned as we begged for mercy, but the more pitifully we pleaded the more they laughed and jeered at us. After we had amused them sufficiently thus, they returned to their feasting. Then, after placing two of their number to watch us, they fell fast asleep.

"Now a Bushman, when really full of meat, must needs sleep, and then he is like a gorged vulture, for nothing will wake him until he has digested the food. If disturbed he will only sprawl about like a drunken man, and roll his eyes like a child a week old. Soon the two watchers slept too, and then the fire died down, and we lay suffering in the darkness. There was no sound except our own groans, the snoring of the Bushmen, who had sunk back, each at the place where he had been sitting, and lay huddled upon the ground, and the murmuring of the stream of water.

"We strove and struggled with our bonds, but they were too cunningly tied for this to be of any avail, so we only put ourselves to greater pain. The plashing of the cool water over the stones only a few yards off maddened us, and we tried to roll towards

it, but a barrier of sharp rocks stood in the way, and this we found it impossible to cross. The jackals came up and began to gnaw the bones around the fireplace; they stepped fearlessly in among the sleepers, as though quite accustomed to so doing.

"We lay thus until it was nearly day. Then I heard a soft voice speak my name. I answered in a whisper, and in a moment Nongala was bending over me, cutting my bonds with a sharp knife.

"I was so stiff that for a while I could hardly move a limb. Nongala went to the others, one by one, and released them as well. After a few minutes our clogged blood began to move once more, and then, suddenly, we seemed to recover our strength. The first thing we did was to recover our weapons.

"Then we went softly to and fro among the sleepers and took possession of their bows and arrows. The reed shafts of the latter we broke, and then we flung them, like snakes with broken backs, in a heap upon the embers. In a short time the heap blazed brightly up, and then we went to work at our vengeance.

"The sleepers lay close together, and we made a ring about them, so that none might escape. But this was not necessary; they were so gorged that not one awakened, even when the spear was at his throat. One by one we slew them as they lay. Then, with one accord, we went to the stream we had been listening to throughout the long night of pain, and drank our fill. But our work was not yet done.

"Around the bones of each of the other three elands—for it proved that not a scrap of meat was left—lay a party of surfeited sleepers, and those we slew as we had slain the others. It was horrible work, but the gall of black anger had risen to our hearts, and we knew that these people had doomed us to a miserable death.

"Day broke just as we had finished the killing, so we struck for home across the mountains. We met Goloza, accompanied by five other men, bringing the cattle for our ransom ; they turned back and accompanied us to Makomo's Great Place—for we went at once to make report of what had happened to the Chief. The war-cry had gone out and men were already assembling. It had been intended to pursue the Bushmen and recover the ransom cattle. There was great astonishment when we related what we had done, and the disgrace of having allowed ourselves to be disarmed and tied up like dogs was regarded as having been wiped out by the blood we had shed.

"You may be sure that Nongala came in for her share of honour. A song, which was sung at every feast for years afterwards, was composed to commemorate the exploit. She became so celebrated that a rumour went forth that Makomo intended to add her to the number of his wives. My own idea is that the grandmother of Nathaniel caused the thing to be talked about through jealousy. I do not know if such be the case, or if the Chief had any such intention, but to avoid the danger Nongala and

I ran away together one night and took refuge with the Chief of the Gaika tribe, who received us kindly, feeling that it was to his honour to have such celebrated people under his protection. Three years afterwards I returned to my own country and Makomo received me kindly.

"For my own part, I have always felt ashamed of having surrendered my weapons and allowed myself to be tied up—to say nothing of having wept like a little boy, and beseeched for my life—than proud of the killing. I do not think that until today anyone has ever told the whole truth about this matter. Often, when I have heard some of the others at a beer-drink boasting of what they have done, I have walked away or hidden my face in my kaross lest the truth should be revealed by my looks. But all the others are now dead, and I am an old man, so what does it matter?

"Yes, I am an old man, and the sooner I am dead the better. The valleys in which I hunted in the days of my youth are full of the Hottentots to whom the Government gave the land, and I doubt if you would find an 'iputi' in the Didima Forest.

"Men can say what they like, but the world is not so good to live in now as it was in the days when I was young. Where has the rain gone to? It has not rained as it used to rain when Makomo was Chief since the Hottentots were given the country.

. . . . . .

"Well, it may be as you say, but if Government

were to drive the Hottentots out and give back the land to Makomo's son, I think you would find that the rain would fall again as it used to. But I am an old man, and my kraal is empty. Yes, I have lived too long.

A FORGOTTEN EXPEDITION

In the early winter of 1874 considerable excitement prevailed in the little mining camp of Pilgrim's Rest. The Transvaal Government (Mr Burgers being President) was reported to be organising an expedition to Delagoa Bay for the purpose of convoying certain arms and ammunition thence to Pretoria. It had been for some time an open secret that an attack was projected upon Seccocoeni, chief of the Bapedi, who had refused to pay hut-tax. The attack was made in due course, and failed, but that has nothing to do with this story.

The war material in question had, with the exception of ten tons of gunpowder purchased from the firm of Pigou & Wilkes, been presented to the Republic by the German Government. It was part of the loot of the Franco-German war.

Delagoa Bay had a bad name. The previous year was a very fatal one in the "low country." Out of thirty-five men who went to prospect, to hunt or to amuse themselves between the mountains and the sea in the early part of 1873, twenty-seven died of fever. They had gone too early, and the rains were late. But the seasons were not known so well in the seventies as they are now.

Twenty-five men were wanted, and, among the

floating population of the reckless and the restless who are always attracted by an alluvial gold-field, these were not difficult to obtain. Accordingly, in the early days of June the expedition started under the command of Major M'Donald (late of the United States' Army), who held the office of Gold Commissioner. The convoy included eight wagons and sixteen spans of oxen. The country of the tsetse fly had to be traversed ; but, unless rain falls, cattle generally live for six weeks or so after being bitten, and it was intended to run the goods through before the oxen succumbed.

We were a various sort of crew, most nations, trades and characters being represented in our meagre ranks. I was the boy of the party, and consequently had a very rough time. My worst tormentor was a powerful brute named Collins ; my best protector a herculean and splendidly handsome Highlander from Skye, named Macpherson, who earned my deathless gratitude by thrashing Collins severely. When sober, "Mac" was always my good friend ; when otherwise he was wont to use me despitefully. Occasionally, when under the influence of Mauritius rum, he would seize me by the heels and swing me round his head.

We passed over the steep and massive mountain range into the mysterious haze-shrouded country which, without any break save the low Lebombo Range, stretches evenly to the mangrove-cumbered coast. After trekking through the undulating foot-hills our course led across a dead level sparsely

timbered and densely covered with thick, wiry grass. The trees usually permitted a vista of about two hundred yards, at the farther end of which one could often see the wild forest creatures melting into the gloom.

Close to Ship Mountain, where the plains begin, we reached the border of the tsetse region, and here we established a dépôt at which we left eight of our sixteen spans of oxen. The country was teeming with game. Lions were much in evidence. Although we seldom saw the animals, their spoor abounded, and their rumbling groans were at night often audible on three sides of the camp at once. We always camped at sundown, the wagons being drawn up in a double line. Before dark the oxen would be secured to the staked-down trek-chains. All hands gathered fuel, which was very plentiful. Six large fires were kept burning all night, and four men were always on guard.

We crossed the Crocodile and Komati rivers—noble streams of clear water several hundred yards in width, eddying between large rocks upon which many crocodiles basked. Along the low banks stood groves of splendid trees, which harboured buffalo, giraffe, water-buck and many other kinds of game. Elephants we never saw, but their spoor was occasionally visible. On one occasion we heard them trumpeting and crashing through the trees.

Near the Komati I had the only narrow escape from death I ever experienced in the hunting-field, and the occasion thereof was a buck not much

bigger than a "duiker." The incident occurred as follows :—

I went out one morning to shoot impala. Now the impala is a small red antelope which used to frequent river banks in immense herds. The does are hornless, but the bucks have sharp horns over eighteen inches long. The proportion of the sexes is about one buck to a hundred does. I stood in a thicket watching a herd pass, waiting for an opportunity to shoot a buck. At length I got a shot, and put a bullet through an animal with particularly fine horns, just behind the shoulder. The buck turned out of the herd, bleeding profusely, and I followed on the spoor. When I overtook my quarry he was standing under a tree, apparently almost at the last gasp. I laid down my rifle, drew my knife and approached. The buck sprang at me like an arrow, head down. I just managed to leap out of the way ; he grazed my leg in passing and fell over, helpless. It was only by the merest chance that I escaped being transfixed.

The first notable incident occurred after we had crossed the Komati and were approaching the Lebombo Range. Early one morning we were astonished to find a tent-wagon standing in a somewhat thickly-wooded hollow. Around it lay the putrifying carcases of several oxen. A few low mounds were also visible. Under the wagon lay four white men in the last stage of exhaustion from fever. All were raving in delirium. There were no signs of water in the vicinity. The surrounding

trees were thickly encrusted with bright yellow lichen, which gave them a ghastly and fever-stricken look.

We camped close to the spot, wondering what could be the explanation of the strange phenomenon. Hours passed, but we could discover no clue. The unhappy creatures under the wagon mowed at us and raved in French. We gave them water, which they greedily drank. The stench was frightful; the mounds we had noticed were human graves. But no excavations had been made, the sand being simply heaped over the bodies.

Then a gigantic, bearded man emerged from the bush and approached, carrying a small demijohn in each hand. I recognised him as one Alexandre, a Frenchman I had known on the diamond fields. He explained matters. The expedition, originally eight strong, had started from Lydenburg some six weeks previously. The whole team of oxen succumbed more quickly than usual to tsetse bite. All his companions went down with fever. Three died and had been laid to their rest under the mounds. But even there rest had been denied them, for the lions used to come at night and tear open the graves; they had actually rooted out one of the bodies. Owing to prodigality of ammunition when the big game was most plentiful, only very few cartridges were left. Every night jackals and hyenas used to snarl and fight over the carcases of the oxen, which lay only a few yards from the wagon. But it was the lions that were the chief source of terror. A

lioness had carried off a dog from the fireside immediately behind the wagon. As though aware of the helplessness of the stricken party, the great brutes became bolder and bolder, walking round and round the camp in an ever-narrowing circle. All this was corroborated by the fact that not a hand's-breadth of ground anywhere near the camp was without a lion's spoor. The nearest water lay ten miles away, and to the spring Alexandre wended, with his two demijohns, every day. We loaded the sick men up—leaving the wagon in the waste like a stranded ship—and took them on to Delagoa Bay.

The road had been cut by the Transvaal authorities to near the inland base of the Lebombo, and by the Portuguese to the seaward base. It fell to our lot to clear a passage over the mountain itself. This entailed a great deal of crowbar work, in rolling out of the way huge boulders. My clearest remembrance in connection with the enterprise is of a scorpion sting which I received in the hand.

We reached Lourenço Marques in due course. The inhabitants turned out *en masse* to meet us. For several miles along the road approaching the town, the trees were loaded with children gaping in dumb curiosity. The town lay between the bay and a crescent-shaped swamp. This was crossed by several causeways. Between the swamp and the houses stood a fortified wall, from which projected many poles bearing mouldering human heads. The town was from the seaward side dominated by a wicked-looking fortress.

The principal inhabitants appeared to be Banyans who, surrounded by members of their dusky harems and clad in picturesque Eastern dress, occupied the stoeps on the shady side of every street. All the houses had closely latticed windows, but these were thrown open when the shades of evening fell.

There was a very high time in the old town that night. Our party took possession of the only hotel —a large, cool and comfortable house kept by a Portuguese named Fernandez, who had an English wife. With our arrival respectability fled shrieking from the premises. I trust I may be acquitted of self-righteousness in recording the circumstance that I was the only sober one among the strangers. We acted more or less like an army which has taken a city by assault.

One of the larger stores stocked a quantity of obsolete fire brigade uniforms. These, in most details suggestive of the burlesque stage, included enormous helmets, which had massive burnished metal guards extending down the wearer's back. Mild hints towards a realisation of these monstrosities may be found in Flaxman's illustrations to the Iliad. We dressed in the uniforms and proceeded to paint the settlement red.

After dinner one of our braves staggered into the hotel dining-room, carrying seven or eight rifles with fixed bayonets attached under one arm, and a trembling Portuguese soldier under the other. This unhappy being was summarily tried for attempted murder. In passing sentence of death—and the

address was punctuated by dabs with a full-cocked and loaded revolver—the judge came crashing to the floor. The marble-topped table on which he sat collapsed into utter ruin. The sentence was to have been carried out at once, but a few of us, who still retained some vestige of our senses, with difficulty succeeded in getting an hour's reprieve to enable the culprit to prepare for eternity. We led him out and let him escape. I shall never forget how he sprinted down the street.

Later, Macpherson and I sallied forth in search of adventure. We happened upon the Governor's residence. Here an archway led into a small courtyard which was full of tropical plants. Another arched doorway led from the courtyard into the house, and over the apex hung a fine pair of koodoo horns. Two sentries paced the footway outside, but we had slipped in before they realised our intentions —Macpherson leading and I following, with misgivings, in his wake. When we looked round, there stood the two sentries barring the way we had entered by with fixed bayonets. Macpherson reached up, tore the koodoo horns from the wall, placed the skull to his chest and charged with a terrible yell. The sentries collapsed. One escaped ; the other we captured and put in a sentry box, which we turned over on him. We stuck the bayoneted rifles into his Excellency's flower-beds and departed, leaving the unhappy sentry a prone prisoner.

Next day the town was, except for ourselves, like a city of the dead. All the shops were shut—not a

soul appeared. The soldiers were shut up in the fort, the cannon of which were trained on the streets. However, some sort of order was restored, negotiations were opened, and it was agreed that we were to load up the goods we had come to fetch early next morning. This we accordingly did. Then we drew our wagons some few miles out of town and held high wassail in the primeval bush.

Our wagons were almost entirely laden with gunpowder, and the loads were light. The gunpowder was contained in 100-lb. kegs. These last were loosely built and hooped together with twigs. The explosive inside was done up in 5-lb. bags. We also had a mitrailleuse, which was drawn by eight oxen. I well remember the name of this weapon, inscribed in large letters on a thick copper plate. It was "Le General Schuler."

About three days' trek from the port lay the Mattol Marsh—a hideous quagmire several hundred yards in width. On our forward journey we had felled trees and laid a corduroy road over it. This the empty wagons crossed with comparative ease, but now when loaded they broke it up with dire results. The barrels had to be carried across. There was no chance of a rest by the way as, on account of the gaping spaces between the staves, the kegs could not be laid down in the mud even for an instant. The bare recollection of that experience gives me toothache in the atlas bone. Then the wagons had to be taken asunder and carried across piecemeal,

but this was not so bad, for we could take an occasional rest.

The Mattol was, alas! not the only marsh we had to cross. Soon, from much handling, the gunpowder barrels began to break up, and we had to deal with the bags. Then these began to give way, and loose powder permeated everything. We tasted it in our tea; we shook it out of our kits when we unrolled them each night. Strict orders against smoking anywhere near the wagons had been given, but no one, from the commander down, paid the least attention to these. I have seen several men lying on the ground smoking under a wagon, and when one climbed up to get his kit, watched small trickles of powder fall among the smokers. Once a grass fire swept towards us before a stiff breeze. We were then outspanned at the Komati Drift. An order was passed round that when the fire reached a certain point we were to leave the wagons to their fate and take to the river. This, by the way, was full of crocodiles. But suddenly the wind died away, so we rushed at the fire and beat it out with our shirts. It was evident that the Fates were determined we were not to be blown up.

Occasionally we trekked by moonlight. One night I was walking with two others some distance in front of the leading wagon. We carried no weapons. One man uttered a low "sh-h" and held up his hand. There, not five yards away, were a lion and a lioness crouched flat in the roadway. We stepped slowly backwards for about fifty yards and

then stood not upon the order of our going until we met the convoy.

One morning buffalo were reported close to the camp. I sprang from my blankets and went after them. I wounded one badly and went on its spoor. The sun began to decline, and I attempted to get back to the wagons. But the country was flat and the trees stood high on every side. Soon the terrible fact came home to me that I was lost.

I had neither eaten nor drunk since the previous evening. The day was sultry; soon I began to suffer from raging thirst. I had only three cartridges left, having expended the others on the wounded buffalo, whose vanishing hindquarters had been my occasional target for several hours. But my thirst became so furious that I determined to shoot some animal and drink its blood. I reached a long and wide depression where trees were few, but which was full of straggling patches of reeds. Looking through one of the latter I became aware of several animals moving to my left. I crept to the end of the reed-patch to intercept them and—out stalked five lions. Two were full grown; three were cubs. The old couple paced majestically away; the cubs squatted funnily on their haunches and looked at me with quaint curiosity.

That night I perched in a tree, where I was driven from bough to bough by predatory ants. When the sun arose I got my bearings roughly. Fortunately the day was cool. Early in the afternoon I managed to strike the trail of the wagons.

After walking on it for about an hour, I found I was going in the wrong direction. But I turned and staggered along until about midnight, when I reached the camp. Here I narrowly escaped being shot, for when the sentry challenged I could not answer, my lips, tongue and throat being like crackling leather. Thus ended the most horrible experience of my life.

We cached our cargo at Ship Mountain, having dug a pit for it in the dry sand. The wagons were at once sent back to Delagoa with the fresh spans. The cattle which had been through the fly country were left at the cache. Six men of our party were put in charge. I happened to be one of these.

Almost immediately the unhappy cattle began to die. Soon they lay in heaps at a spot about a mile from the camp. Thither we used to drive them when signs of collapse set in. It would, of course, have been far more merciful to shoot them all at once, but this we were not permitted to do.

At this bovine Golgotha congregated all the carnivora of the neighbourhood. Lions, hyenas and jackals were always to be found. It is popularly believed that lions will not eat carrion. This is a mistake; I have seen them doing so and apparently enjoying themselves.

Our nights were made hideous by the hyenas, whose yell is surely one of the most atrocious sounds in Nature's repertoire. Lions worried us considerably. On dark nights they used to drink at, and befoul, a pool within ten yards of our tent. There was no other water for many miles around. One

evening a runner with letters from Lydenburg was driven up a tree by a lion within a couple of miles of our camp and kept a prisoner until about eleven next forenoon.

I recall one trifling incident which left a very weird impression. One very dark night we heard a far-off halloo. The surrounding country was absolutely uninhabited—so far as human beings were concerned. The source of the noise drew nearer and nearer, the halloo sounding at short intervals. It was unmistakably a human voice. We made a roaring blaze, shouted, waved firebrands and discharged guns. But the creature with the human voice passed, I should say, about three hundred yards from us, uttering its gruesome cry at intervals. Then the cry grew fainter and fainter, until it died away in the distance. None of us slept a wink that night.

In our charge were thirty donkeys. For these we built a high corral. The country being full of game—and sick oxen—the lions never interfered with these donkeys, although the spoors showed that they used to prowl around the enclosure nearly every night, evidently meditating a spring.

One day we saw a vast cloud of dust steadily approaching from the distant south-west. There was not a breath of wind stirring. Then came a sound like that of the sea. This swelled to a thunderous roar, and soon we were surrounded by a mighty host of stampeding big game. Buffalo, quagga, wildebeest, koodoo, hartebeest, and many other varieties were jostling together and rushing

wildly on. Occasionally the long, swaying necks of a troop of giraffe would loom dimly above the thronging mass. Had it not been for the fact that three big trees shielded our tent, I firmly believe we would have been overwhelmed.

It took about twenty minutes for this hurricane to pass. Our thirty donkeys had disappeared, carried along by the resistless flood. I found two of these a couple of days afterwards, about ten miles away. The others were seen no more. After the stampede not a single head of game was to be found in the neighbourhood, so we were reduced for some time to a diet of dried peas.

In due course the second convoy arrived from the Bay, and four wagons, drawn by such of the oxen as were still fit to travel, were sent on to Lydenburg. I accompanied these.

When we began to ascend the mountain spurs the nights turned bitterly cold. We had desperately hard work, for the cattle became so weak that we had to unload at nearly every donga. Being, as we thought, out of the lion country, our vigilance at night was somewhat relaxed. We posted only one sentry at a time, nor were large fires around the camp any longer compulsory. Very early on the morning before we reached the summit of the range I was on guard. Mine was the third watch, and my two predecessors had so faked our only time-piece that my vigil had lasted nearer six than the regulation three hours. One of the recovered donkeys was tied to a bush about twelve feet from where I sat,

vainly endeavouring to warm my hands over a few dying embers. Just before daybreak two lions sprang on the unhappy donkey. I heard the wretched animal's bones crack. The lions dragged the carcase about fifty yards away—into a thick bush—and there breakfasted at their leisure.

On our return to Lydenburg most of the members of the expedition were paid off. We had lost only one man; he perished in a grass fire in the low country.

I often wonder as to what has been the fate of my companions. Some few I have heard of; only three have I since foregathered with. Two of the latter I know to be dead. The others are—where?

My one-time comrades, I salute you—or your shades. Taking into account the kind of men you were, the way you lived and moved and had your being, and the fact that you were all so much older than I, few should, in the natural course of events, be still alive. A short, but by no means a merry, life is the usual lot of such as you. May your spirits have found that rest which could never have been their portion on earth. Vale!

KAFFIR MUSIC

If one were to ask the average inhabitant of South Africa whether the Bantu tribes have any national music, the reply would almost surely be in the negative. It is known that the mission-trained native sometimes develops remarkable singing powers, and that he picks up part-music with strange facility; but in his natural state the native is supposed only to exercise his vocal powers in the "tshotsha," which is a lugubrious sound generated deep down in the throat, and suggests a commingling of the notes of the corn-crake with the noise made by the wind in streaming over the open bunghole of an empty barrel.

Nevertheless, the Bantu possesses a music of his own; but this can only be heard, as a rule, if one frequent the celebration of his tribal ceremonies.

Many of the native songs and chants are very intricate compositions, in which the different parts are adjusted to each other with ingenious nicety. Such part-songs are probably extremely old, and have reached their present development very gradually.

It is not, however, with these that this article will deal, but rather with simple tunes which it has

been found possible to note down as opportunity offered. Such may be of interest for purposes of comparison with the rudimentary music of other savage peoples.

The tunes given are mostly battle-songs, each probably struck out like a spark upon the occasion of some great tribal emergency.

In giving the following specimens of tunes collected among the Hlubi tribe, it may be of interest to indicate shortly, where possible, the historical episode to which each relates. The Hlubi tribe was one of the first to move in the great migration which took place from what is now Natal, early in the present century, before the onslaught of Tshaka, the Zulu king. The Hlubis were not, as a matter of fact, driven forth by the Zulus, but by another tribe, the Amangwanè, whose chief—Matiwanè, "the destroyer"—had evidently been incited by Tshaka to declare war. They fled across the Drakensberg Mountains to what is now the Orange Free State, and there led a life of continuous warfare for ten or twelve years.

The Hlubi chief Umti'mkulu[1] was killed, with nearly all his household. It was believed that not a single member survived. Afterwards, however, it transpired that his great wife, with her infant son, Langalibalèlè,[2] had escaped. The latter eventually died in exile, having rebelled against the British Government in Natal in the early seventies.

Upon the death of Umti'mkulu, the chieftain-

[1] "Big tree."

[2] "The sun scorches."

ship temporarily devolved upon his nephew, Sidinanè. This chief had a short and tragic career. His memory is revered among the adherents of the "right-hand house" of the Hlubi tribe, of which he was the head, and his pathetic story even now brings tears to the eyes of the old men.

It appears that after the death of Umti'mkulu, the Hlubis for a long time wandered about, in a great disorganised mob, over the wide plains lying between the Vaal and Orange rivers. They were exposed to attacks from the Zulus, the Matebele under Umzil'igazi,[1] and the Amangwane under Matiwanè "the destroyer." A number had already submitted to the Matabele chief, and been incorporated in his regiments. One night the Hlubis were attacked by a Matabele force, but they scattered under cover of the darkness, without making any resistance. Next morning they opened negotiations with the Matabele induna, and eventually agreed to submit to Umzil'igazi. The Matabele force was returning, laden with booty, from a raid upon the Basuto. Messengers were despatched to Umzil'igazi, informing him of the submission of the Hlubis, and asking whether they were to be destroyed or spared. Umzil'igazi sent back a message to say that the submission of the Hlubis was to be accepted, but that Sidinanè and every member of his family were to be killed. The latter part of the message was supposed to be secret, but it was communicated to

[1] "Bloody trail"—father of Lo Bengula; usually called "Moselikatse."

Sidinanè by one of the Hlubis belonging to the Matabele force.

Sidinanè was a young man ; his family consisted of a wife and an infant son. In the night he fled, accompanied by his wife and child, leaving the tribe in charge of his younger brother Sondaba, who agreed to personate him.

Sidinanè fled to Swaziland. On the way his child died of the hardships of the journey. He was kindly treated by the Swazi chief, but he could not rest. He departed for Zululand, and went straight to Tshaka's kraal. His wife refused to accompany him. Tshaka received him with civility, and agreed to accept him as a vassal. An ox had just been slaughtered, so Tshaka ordered Sidinanè to skin it. Sidinanè, after indignantly refusing to perform such menial work, wandered forth once more. We next hear of him as captured by the Amangwanè, and brought before the cruel Matiwanè. Tradition states that he was put into an enclosure in which a lot of bulls were fighting, and that he stilled them with a word. This raised the jealous wrath of Matiwanè, who at once caused the captive to be strangled. The chief Zibi, who is at present at the head of the right-hand house of the Hlubis, is looked upon as Sidinanè's son, but he is really the son of Sidinanè's brother, in terms of the practice as defined in the fifth verse of the twenty-fifth chapter of Deuteronomy.

Sondaba found it impossible to keep up his impersonation of Sidinanè. Umzil'igazi, however,

forgave him the deception, and located him at a large military kraal which was situated about two days' journey from the "Great Place," and was under the command of a favourite induna, or general, called Soxokozela. Here he remained for upwards of a year.

Umzil'igazi sent for his new vassal. The great place of the Matabele chief was close to the present site of Potchefstroom, in the Transvaal, at a spot then called Ezinyosini, which means "the place of bees."

A great feast was held in honour of the guest. When Sondaba was led before Umzil'igazi, the latter was struck by the size of the young man's eyes, so he at once gave him the name of Mehlomakulu.[1] This name quite superseded the original patronymic.

Mehlomakulu was of splendid physique, and had all the bearing of a chief and a leader of men. Consequently he at once incurred the jealousy and hatred of Umzil'igazi. The latter was particularly struck by the superiority of his guest's dancing, as well as the clever way in which he flung his club into the air in the course of the dance and caught it again as it fell. The Matabele chief was heard to say, as he lifted his head to follow the course of the club as it soared—"You are blinding me—you are breaking my neck." The death of Mehlomakulu was determined on, but he was allowed to return home in the meantime.

[1] "Big eyes."

Shortly afterwards Mehlomakulu heard from a spy that he was to be killed immediately—that an impi was even then assembling to fall upon him. He thereupon called together his principal men in order to discuss the situation.

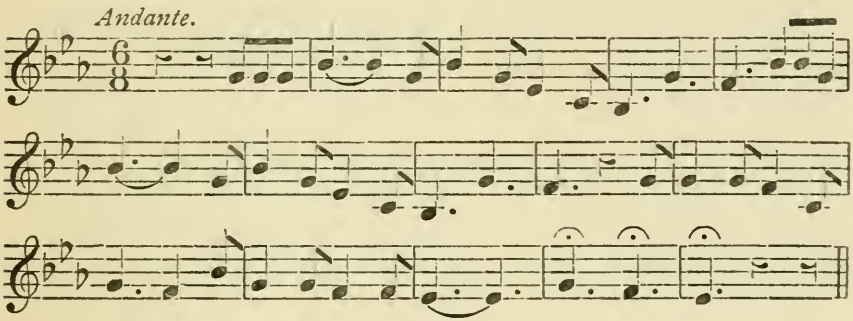
A number of Soxokozela's soldiers had left the kraal to meet the advancing impi. It was now only a question of hours: whatever was to be done must be done quickly.

With tears and many protestations of sorrow, the majority of the Hlubi councillors and headmen decided to leave their chief to his fate. "We are tired of wandering," they said; "Umzil'igazi is strong and able to protect us. Let Mehlomakulu go forth if he will; it is against him that the hate of Umzil'igazi is hot. We have lived for years gathering roots under the spears of Matiwanè; we will now remain as subjects of the chief of the Matabele."

While this was going on, an uncle and devoted adherent of Mehlomakulu left the meeting quietly and assembled his followers. With these he surrounded the kraal of Soxokozela, and killed the induna with every member of his family. The killing party then hastened back, flung down their blood-stained spears before the assembly, and told what they had done. The matter was now plain and clear: they knew that the killing of Soxokozela would never be forgiven by Umzil'igazi; that unless they fled the lives of all would be sacrificed.

So the war-cry — a long "g" of the second line of the treble clef, which is wailed out with piercing shrillness—was raised. All the other Matabele within reach were killed, the cattle were quickly collected, and the Hlubis fled to the eastward.

In commemoration of this episode the following song was composed by the tribal bard :—



The words run as follows :—

"Sondaba has killed Mehlomakulu : Mehlomakulu has killed Lihlongo (the latter being another of Mehlomakulu's names) : Lihlongo has killed Sondaba."

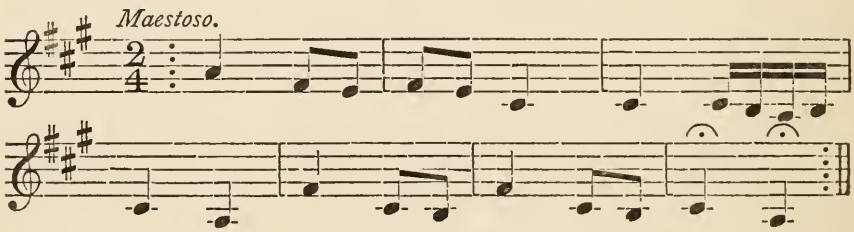
This somehow suggests "Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor, etc."

The Hlubis managed to escape to a fairly strong position on the western bank of the Caledon River, before being overtaken by the pursuing Matabele. The latter came up just at nightfall. They were hungry and tired, but they nevertheless attacked without delay. There were a number of Hlubis in

their ranks, but these at once deserted to Mehlomakulu's side. Then the Matabele fell back for a few hundred yards and halted. The Hlubi deserters told Mehlomakulu that the enemy would most probably make a night attack, so the Hlubi chief, with the pick of his force, stole quietly back and took up a position in some broken ground, which the enemy, if they attacked, would have to cross.

They had not long to wait—the whole Matabele impi advanced stealthily towards the Hlubi encampment, but it fell into the ambush and was cut to pieces. Next morning the battle-field was found to be thickly strewn with the shields and spears which had been thrown away in the flight. The shields were piled together and burnt; the spears proved a welcome and much-needed addition to the Hlubi armament.

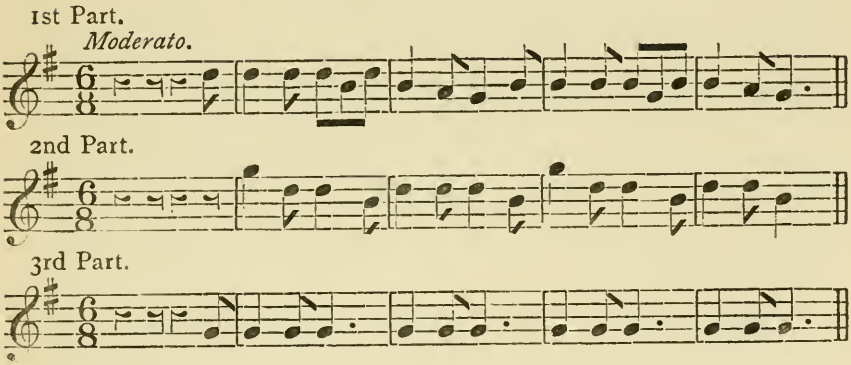
Then the following song was composed in honour of the victorious chief:—



The words are:—

"Spotted leopard, come out so that we can see you."

The next song also dates from this occasion :—



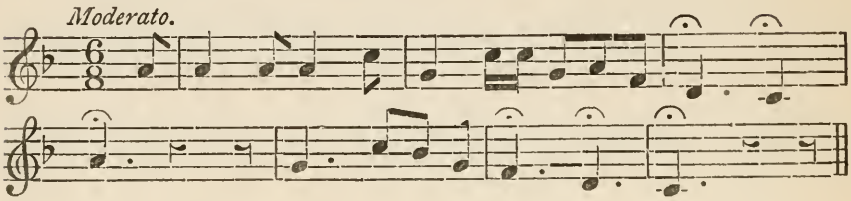
The words are :—

"Run off with your plunder, Chief !—Houti ma-e-a."

The concluding portion is rather obscure ; in fact, it has been found quite impracticable to trace its meaning. Possibly—and this is a suggestion on the part of a very old native,—it represents an attempt to reproduce the lowing of the looted cattle when being driven off.

With varying fortune Mehlomakulu waged a war which lasted for about eight years with the Amangwanè, as well as with the different expeditions which Tshaka sent against him and Matiwanè. It was a curious situation—the Hlubis and the Amangwanè locked in a deadly struggle with each other, and being attacked, together or in detail, from time to time by Tshaka. It does not appear that the notion of combining against the common enemy ever suggested itself to either the Hlubi or the 'Mangwanè chief.

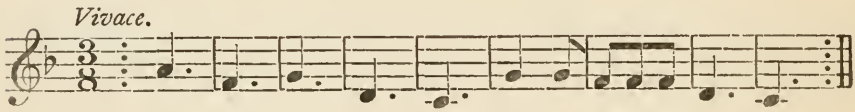
After a successful raid against Matiwanè's cattle, the following song was composed :—



The words are :—

"The Chief is pregnant with the number of cattle he has taken.—Ho, ho, ho, aha; ho, oho, ho, ho!"

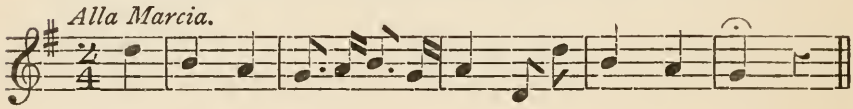
At one period of their wanderings the Hlubis were driven into the mountainous, inhospitable country that lies near the source of the Orange River. The following song is connected with this episode :—



The words of this song are :—

"The Orange River : It is far away : It flows : The Orange River : I see the mountains of the Zulus."

What follows is the last of the Hlubi series :—



Its words are :—

"Ho, ho!—We call to the chief. He is as great as the ocean."

Within a few years of the flight of the Hlubis, the Baca tribe was driven from its home, on and about the present site of Maritzburg, Natal. The reigning chief was Madikanè. Around his memory hangs an accretion of many legends. There is some ground for thinking that Madikanè's mother was an European, possibly a waif from one or other of the vessels which are known to have been wrecked on the east coast of Southern Africa toward the end of the last century. The words of one of the songs composed in his honour run somewhat as follows :—

"'Mngcanganè (one of Madikanè's names) is an animal,—
Ho !—What shall we do with him ?
There is no chief who can conquer a white chief,—
Hi !—What shall we do with him ?"

These words clearly indicate the peculiarity of Madikanè's appearance, as well as that he was light of colour. The air to which these words are sung does not merit reproduction.

All authorities agree that Madikanè was of great stature, that he was light in colour, and that his hair and beard were long. It was his habit to carry his snuff-spoon stuck in the hair of his chest. One of the writers has examined a number of his male descendants, and found about one in every four with traces of hair on the chest. It is, it may be stated, very unusual to find any hair on the body of a Bantu.

Madikanè placed himself at the head of his own shattered tribe, together with the fugitives from some

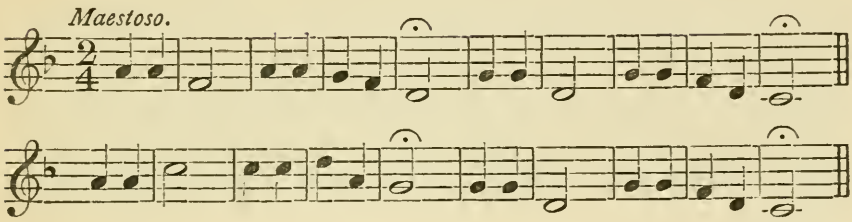
forty-four broken clans, and led them southward. He was killed on December 19th, 1824, in a combined attack made by the Tembus and Gcalekas, and on the next day there was a total eclipse of the sun.

The Baca women and children were all either killed or captured. Many of them wore ivory armlets, which had been put on when they were children, and which, consequently, could not be drawn off. For the sake of the ivory, the savage victors cut the hands off the unfortunate creatures and turned them abroad to die. Some few managed to make their way back, for over a hundred miles, to the valley of the Umzimvubu River — one of the former sojourning places of the tribe—and lived for many years. The last of these died only about eight years ago.

The eclipse on the following day was taken as a tremendous portent. All the fighting men were called up to the great places of the Tembu and Gcaleka chiefs, respectively, for the purpose of being doctored. The Bacas, in their flight, came upon an immense number of Tembu women and children who were proceeding, with cattle, with the intention of occupying an uninhabited piece of country under the Drakensburg Range. These the Bacas captured and took away, so as to rehabilitate themselves for their losses, domestic and other.

The following is the tribal war-song of the Baca tribe. It is a tune held in great veneration, and is never used except upon important occasions. Sung

in slow, stately unison by a number of men on the war-path, it has an indescribably impressive effect :—



This song is apparently of great antiquity. Its words have quite lost their meaning. They are simply :—

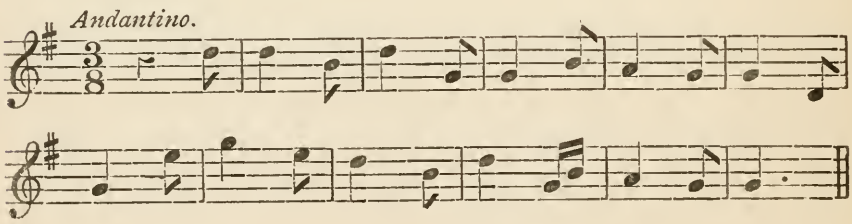
"Eye ya how, eye ya yow yow yow."

Tradition relates that when Madikanè was a boy he disappeared mysteriously. The witch-doctors told his father Kalimetsh not to be uneasy, as the boy would come back. Afrer an absence of eight months he returned, saying that he had been in the forest learning the magical use of roots. He called to his uncle and two of his brothers, and they accompanied him to the place of his secret sojourn, driving with them a black ox. When they arrived at the specified spot the ox was slaughtered. Portions of the meat were then spread about for the use of the "imishologu," or ancestral spirits, and then the tribal song was sung. After this the young man asked the others what they would like to be "doctored" for. The uncle suffered

from a dread of being poisoned, and asked to be so doctored that poison should have no effect on him. The others asked to be so doctored as to become great fighting chiefs.

At the annual "incubi," or "feast of the first-fruits," which is held by the Bacas—when the chief rushes out of his hut after being doctored, and flings an assegai towards the rising sun—the tribal song is sung in full chorus by the assembled lieges.

Each individual chief adopts a song composed specially in his honour, and which is ever afterwards associated with him. In Madikanè's song there is an undertone of sadness, as well as a finish, which, in view of the fact that his mother was probably a white woman, might almost lead one to think that it had a civilised source. Possibly it may be a sort of reflection of some melody of her childhood which the mother had been heard singing. It is as follows :—

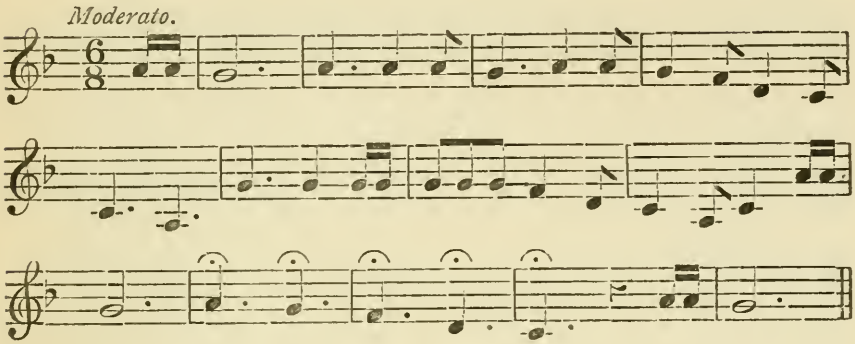


These are the words :

"An assegai thrown among the Zulus, plays. You are a young animal to the Zulus."

Madikanè's peculiar appearance is apparently again referred to in the foregoing.

The next is the song which was dedicated to the present chief, Makaula, upon his accession :

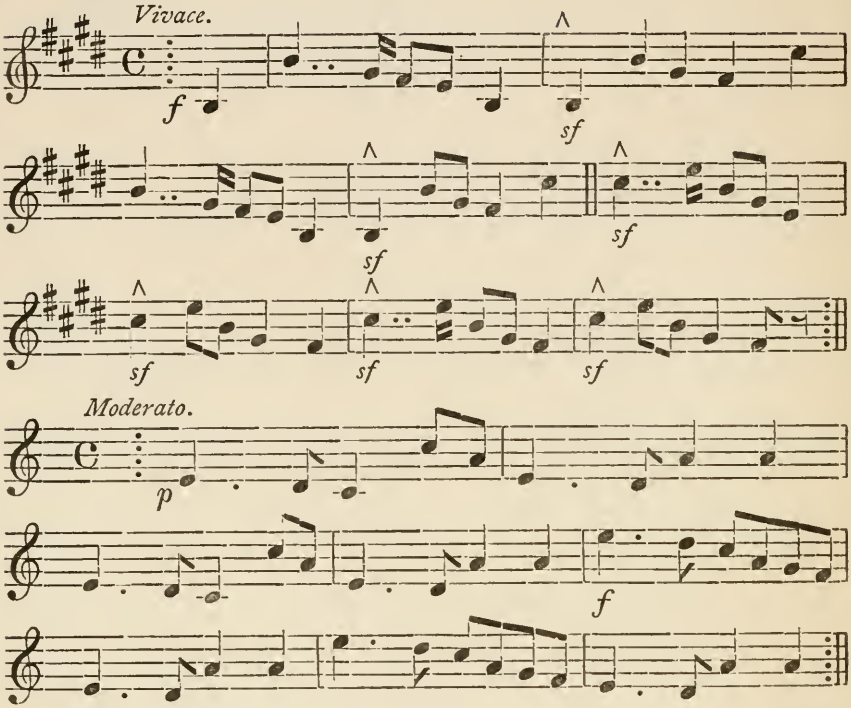


The words are :—

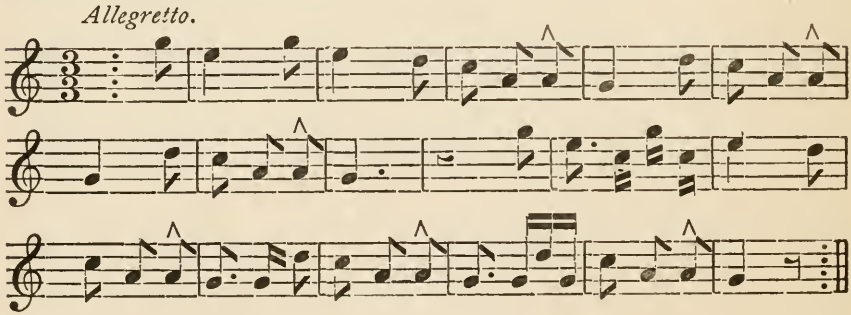
"All the chiefs opposed Makaula by name; they said he would never be a chief. He is the youngest of all the chiefs. Orange River" (with the last syllable repeated several times).

Makaula succeeded to the chieftainship when quite a boy, upon the death of his father, 'Ncapai, who was killed in a war with the Pondos in 1845. The mention of the Orange River has reference to the fact of the Bacas having wandered to its inhospitable source after being driven southward before the spears of Tshaka.

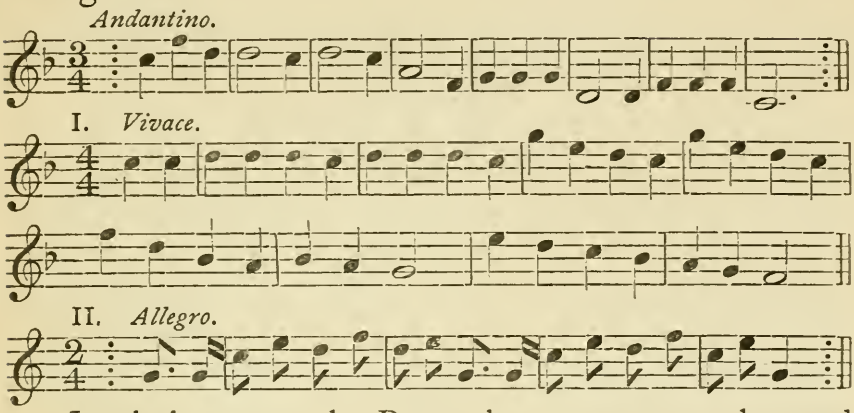
The two airs next following are danced to by the Bacas :—



The following air is common among all the tribes between the Shangaan country, north of Delagoa Bay, and Pondoland :—



The three last examples given are songs heard by one of the writers among the Tongas and Shangaans :—



In their songs the Bantu have never got beyond a few words set to a tune of a few bars, these being sung with monotonous repetition. In spite of their monotony, the songs have a wild charm which is all their own. The Kaffirs are as loyal to their chiefs as were the Scottish Highlanders of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Probably among no other people in the world is the sentiment of loyalty so strong. In each of these simple melodies a treasured story lies embalmed and fragrant. Up to the present the habiliments of civilisation sit but ill upon the savages of South Africa, whose waning ideals are clustered around the leafless tree of ancestry as a swarm of belated bees cluster over the portals of a ruined nest. In singing their songs the natives reconstruct the departed glories of the grand old "houses" which have, as they themselves say, "withered," for a few fleeting and pathetic moments.

NOTE

"Voices of Africa" appeared in *The Spectator*; "The Lepers," in *Scribner's Magazine*; "The Wisdom of the Serpent," "Rainmaking," "Mr Bloxam's Choice" and "The Hunter of the Didima," in *The Graphic*; "By the Waters of Marah," in *Cornhill*; "Kaffir Music," in the *Pall Mall Magazine*; "Tommy's Evil Genius," "Afar in the Desert" and "A Forgotten Expedition," in the *African Monthly*. Most of the others were published in *The South African News*.

"Kaffir Music" was written in collaboration with my wife.

CALEDON, CAPE COLONY,
February 1907.

EDINBURGH
COLSTON AND COY. LIMITED
PRINTERS

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW

AN INITIAL FINE OF 25 CENTS
WILL BE ASSESSED FOR FAILURE TO RETURN
THIS BOOK ON THE DATE DUE. THE PENALTY
WILL INCREASE TO 50 CENTS ON THE FOURTH
DAY AND TO $1.00 ON THE SEVENTH DAY
OVERDUE.

SEP 15 1932

LD 21-20m-6,'32

387193

Scully

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY